

91, 96, show two impressions, and three others, N. xxiv. viii. 77, 85, 87, each three impressions. Now this prevalence of single seals might at first thought seem to militate against the assumption that the mass of double rectangular tablets here deposited contained deeds, contracts, or the like. But even without the direct evidence of the documents already deciphered, of which more below, it is well to remember that a practice widely spread through different regions and periods was content to authenticate such legal instruments merely by the seal or signature of the person of authority before whom they were drawn up.¹⁰

Seal of
Chinese
command of
Shan-shan.

Now from this point of view we have a seal of the greatest interest on the two double tablets N. xxiv. viii. 74, 93 (Plate XX) which show the impression of a square seal with four Chinese 'seal characters'. The same is seen also on the rectangular covering-tablet N. xxxvii. i. 2 (Plate XXIII). From the transcript made by Chiang Szü-yeh M. Chavannes has read these characters as 鄯善郡印 *Shan-shan chün yin*, meaning 'seal of the [chief official of the] command of Shan-shan', and Mr. Hopkins's examination of the original has confirmed this interpretation. The term *chün* 郡 'command', as M. Chavannes points out, corresponds to the 'prefecture' *fu* 府 of modern times. It has already been noted above that the 'kingdom of Ching-chüeh' the chief settlement of which must be located at the Niya Site, was dependent on Shan-shan or the Lop-nör territory during the very period which preceded the abandonment of the ancient oasis towards the end of the third century A. D.¹¹ The discovery of these documents bearing the seal of the Chinese official in political charge of Shan-shan thus strikingly corroborates the statement of the *Wei lio* about the relation of Shan-shan and Ching-chüeh, and at the same time suggests that the control of the Chinese administration over the civil affairs of this region was greater than might otherwise have been supposed; for, as we shall see presently, Prof. Rapson's decipherment of N. xxiv. viii. 74, now opportunely available, conclusively proves that this document is a deed concerning the sale of land.

Groups of
clay seal-
ings.

None of the other twenty seals of which impressions appear on these documents furnishes any indication as to the persons who used them; for only one of them, the right-hand seal among the three borne by N. xxiv. viii. 77, shows any writing, and its faintly impressed characters, apparently Kharoṣṭhī, cannot for the present be read with any certainty. — Of several we have repeated impressions, and it is curious to note that a pair of seals (N. xxiv. viii. 73, 81) and a triplet (N. xxiv. viii. 85, 87) appear twice, placed side by side in identical fashion. Were these the seals of officials holding joint charge or of partners figuring in repeated transactions? In the pair of seals just referred to (see Plates XX, XXIII) we see an archaic Zeus from an intaglio of undoubtedly classical workmanship and a head with long curling hair which shows clearly the influence of a late Medusa type. In the triplet of seals, N. xxiv. viii. 85, 87 (Plates XX, XXI), the impression to the right is the best preserved; it is taken from a round intaglio showing two heads set back to back and surmounted by a third. This representation of an Indian Trimūrti is curious, especially as the influence of the classical engraver is unmistakable in both design and technique.

Classical
influence in
seal types.

Of Western workmanship were probably the intaglios found impressed on N. xxiv. viii. 77, 78, one showing the bust of a male holding a flower and the other a pair of male and female figures facing each other. Unfortunately both seals are too poorly preserved for reproduction. The bust

¹⁰ It may suffice to quote here what Sir Henry Yule states regarding the original of the Last Will of Marco Polo who passed the Niya region just about a thousand years after the probable date when this archive was hidden: 'There is no signature, as may be seen, except those of the Witnesses and the Notary. The sole presence of a Notary was held to

make a deed valid, and from about the middle of the thirteenth century in Italy it is common to find no actual signature (even of witnesses) except that of the Notary'; cf. Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. Introd. p. 72, note.

¹¹ See above, p. 219.