

tower, and about a foot below the surface. Yet obviously these coins could not by themselves suffice for the dating of a ruin which even at the present day is within reach of people from the Tun-huang oasis; for we know that this type must have continued to circulate right down to the beginning of the T'ang period.

I next proceeded to the first tower visible to the south-west, whence return to camp would be shorter for the tender feet of our Chinese diggers. For about three-quarters of a mile the low, gravel-covered plateau—for such it proved to be—continued, and for this distance I could trace the line of the wall with ease. As parts of it were still over three feet in height, I could ascertain that the method of construction was exactly of the type first observed near T. III, tamarisk branches being used instead of reeds for the fascines which intervened between the successive layers of stamped clay. Beyond, I lost the wall on difficult ground, true *terrain coupé*, where soft eroded soil lay amidst scattered tamarisk-cones and dunes rising up to fifteen feet or so. After another mile and a half we arrived at the ruin sighted, T. XXVII (Fig. 153; Plate 34). Though badly decayed, especially on the east and south, it could clearly be recognized as that of a watch-tower. It had been built on a narrow clay ridge, undoubtedly of the type and origin previously described, and extending as usual from east to west. A section of this ridge is also shown in Plate 34. The top of the terrace, occupied by the tower, rose about seventeen feet above the level of the eroded ground on the south and showed clear marks of erosion having continued since the tower was erected. To this fact it is due that the original dimensions of its base could not be measured with accuracy. Brickwork could be traced on the north face for about twenty-two feet and on the west for about nineteen feet; but there can be little doubt that this tower, too, had been, as usual, square in ground plan. It was built of sun-dried bricks, full of straw and rather soft, measuring on the average eighteen by nineteen inches, with a thickness of seven inches. Its actual height was about seventeen feet.

Watch-tower T. XXVII traced.

Close to the west side of the tower was a mass of fairly soft refuse, extending over the top of the ridge for a length of about fifteen feet (Fig. 155). As subsequent clearing showed (see Plate 34) it overlay the remains of a small structure, poorly built and partially cut into the natural clay, and filled it to a height of three to four feet. Scarcely had the men been set to work on this refuse when there turned up, on the south-west and quite close to the surface, three wooden slips inscribed with quite clear Chinese characters, T. XXVII. 1-3 (*Doc.*, Nos. 577, 564, 563; Plates XVI, XVII).² They were in perfect preservation and of the usual size, being close on nine and a half inches in length and from a quarter to half an inch wide. Chiang Ssü-yeh at first sight recognized that two of them bore full dates, a most welcome discovery. Presently three more inscribed 'slips' emerged from under six inches to a foot of rubbish in the middle of the heap. One of them, T. XXVII. 5 (*Doc.*, No. 566, Plate XVI), though incomplete through being burned at one end, also bore a date. It was obvious that I had struck a good mine. But there was no time left to clear it with care before nightfall, and, as it was impossible to locate the *nien-haos*, or regnal periods, without reference to tables, I hastened to return to camp. Both Chiang and myself were greatly exercised by conjectures about the age which the dated records would reveal for the ruined towers and the line of wall guarded by them.

Chinese slips on wood from T. XXVII.

Arrived in camp I settled down with Chiang Ssü-yeh to search for the 'Nien-haos' in the chronological tables attached to Mayers' *Chinese Reader's Manual*. In the absence of any definite clue, hundreds of regnal periods had to be searched through within the limits which seemed possible, from Han to Sung times. Of the reading of one Nien-hao, *Yung Ping* 永平, in T. XXVII. 5, Chiang

Identification of *nien-haos*.

² The site-mark T. XXVII. 1 of No. 577 appears through a misreading as T. XXVII. 6¹ in *Documents*, p. 125, and in Pl. XVII, *ibid*.