

Doc., No. 614, Plate XVIII) illustrates the often remarkable neatness of the writing, and also the obvious desire to bring the whole of a communication or record on to a single slip. Sometimes, however, the writing was arranged in more than one column on the same face of the slip (see e. g. *Doc.* No. 682, Plate XIX), or continued on the back (e. g. *Doc.*, No. 563, Plate XVI). It is clear that there must have been cases when private letters or official documents—to say nothing of texts of books, etc.—required more than one slip for their record. As to the method used for keeping such a series arranged, some notes will be found below.^{2a}

Materials,
shapes of
wooden
stationery.

Bamboo
slips.

'Copy-
writing' on
wood.

Local names
of *Wan-sui*
and *T'un-
hu*.

Among the woods used for the slips, that of the cultivated poplar (*Populus alba*) seemed by far the most frequent, just as it had been at the Niya and Lou-lan Sites. But, as I had already noticed at Lou-lan (see e. g. *Doc.*, Nos. 752, 754, Plate XXIII), there appeared also, as seen e. g. in *Doc.*, Nos. 607, 627, Plate XVIII, etc., a peculiarly streaked, soft wood which Naik Rām Singh, being a carpenter by inherited training, at once recognized as belonging to some conifer. It certainly could not have grown in a climate so arid as that of the lower Su-lo Ho basin must have been throughout historical times; of this the survival of the Limes remains is by itself conclusive evidence. The nearest and most likely district for its supply was on the north slopes of the western and central Nan-shan, where I subsequently found remnants of fir forest, still considerable in extent. An import from a far greater distance is represented by the neat slips of bamboo which turned up at other ruined stations of the Limes west of Tun-huang (see e. g. *Doc.*, Nos. 524-31, Plate XIV), and of which T. xxviii. add., No. 645, was my first specimen on this ground. Additional variety was given to this ancient wooden stationery by the use of that abundant local material, the tamarisk. Among the finds of the refuse-heap at T. xxviii it appeared in what might be called 'fancy' shapes, such as tamarisk sticks with several roughly-cut faces, e. g. Nos. 618, 629, 640, 644 (*Doc.*, Plate XVIII), or else with the bark left adhering in part, No. 641; the notched polygonal stick, No. 617 (*Doc.*, Plate XVIII); the peg-topped broad label, No. 616 (*ibid.*); the curious ladle-shaped piece, No. 628, etc. Clerical convention was evidently not so strict for personal communications between those stationed on the line as about official correspondence. For mere 'copy-writing', with which soldiers quartered at this and other stations seem often to have beguiled their time (see e. g. Nos. 641, 643), sticks of tamarisk cut on the spot were obviously good enough. Yet the supply of properly made wooden stationery clearly had its value, and for economy's sake it was used over and over again, as is shown by the number of 'shavings' from regular slips (e. g. *Doc.*, No. 649, Plate XVIII), and the fact that the slips have often been thinned by repeated paring.

Turning to the contents of the documents found at T. xxviii, I may note among points of local interest that the complete slip No. 614 (*Doc.*, Plate XVIII), dated in A. D. 75, mentions the *Yang-wei* company, which we have already come across at T. xxvii. Two men belonging to it are reported to have received and forwarded a letter brought by a mounted official from *Hsi-p'u* 西蒲, a place which is not otherwise mentioned, but which, considering the position of the post relative to the route towards Hāmi, might well have been situated in that direction outside the Limes. No. 613, also of A. D. 75, refers to the commandant of the watch-post of *Kao-wang*, a name which in a record of T. xxvii (No. 565) figures as that of a company stationed apparently in this neighbourhood in A. D. 53. The *Yang-wei* and *P'o-hu* companies are named in Nos. 620, 621, but without details which might help to determine their station. Of more interest to us is the polygonal notched stick No. 617, *Doc.*, Plate XVIII, on which is written a direction for the circulating, apparently of some order, 'to the commandants of observation posts and to the quarters of companies in the eastern and western sections of *Wan-sui* and in the eastern section of *T'un-hu* 吞胡'. The latter name is found also in Nos. 618, 619. Of *Wan-sui* we have seen above that it was probably the designation

^{2a} See chap. xx. sec. vi.