

Samarkand existed in the Lop tract during the seventh century A. D.⁸ And, as he has justly added, there is equally authentic evidence to prove also that at that later period colonies of Sogdian emigrants were to be found still further away to the east and north, at Turfān, Kara-balgasun, and even in distant Hsi-an-fu.⁹ There would, therefore, be no reason for surprise if subsequent discoveries and researches were to prove the correctness of my conjecture with regard to the character and significance of this solitary small document in Early Sogdian, T. vi. c. ii. 1.

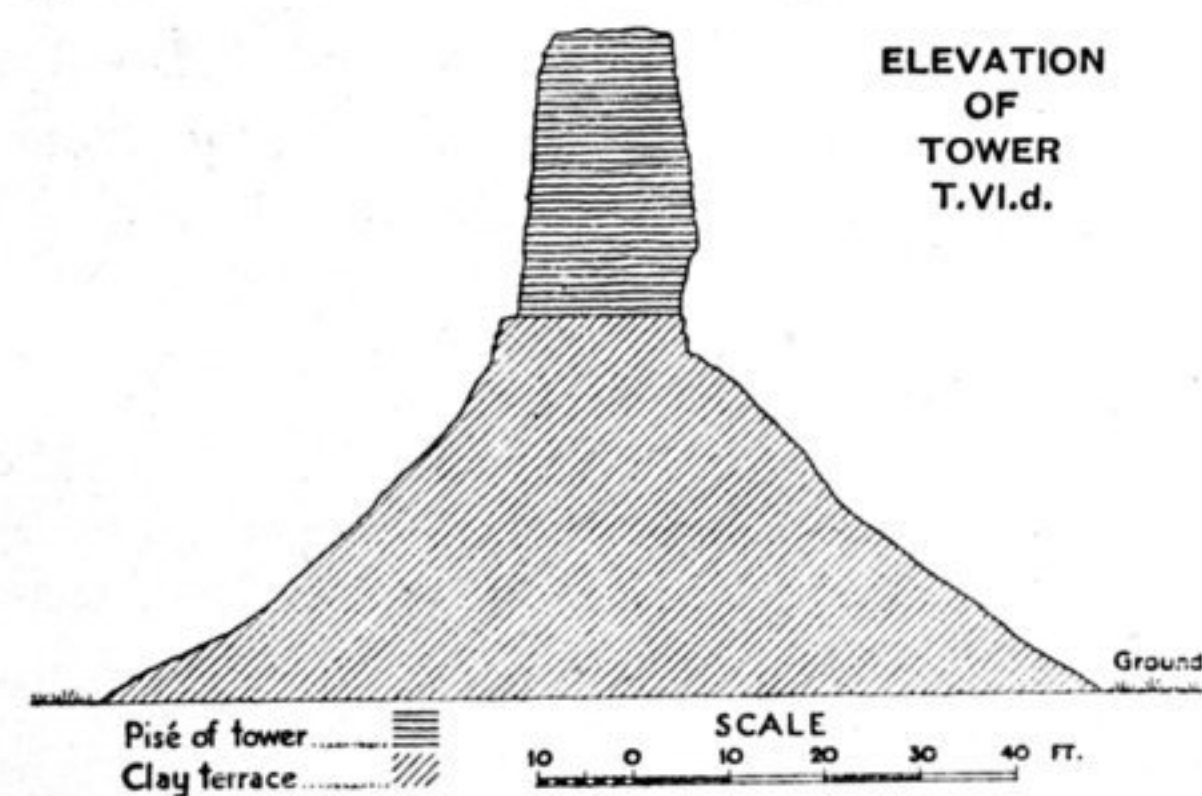
Early Sogdian tablet probably tally.

I may add in conclusion that the very appearance of the tablet suggests a further antiquarian argument for its having been written and intended to be read on this very border. As the reproduction in Plate CLVII shows, it looks distinctly like the right half of a larger inscribed piece cut through on purpose to serve as a tally. This is proved not only by the clean edge at the cutting, but also by the manifest monogram or signature which appears below the writing, together with the half of a symmetrical diagram.¹⁰ It seems quite certain that the tablet was cut into two exact halves and was, no doubt, a device as carefully thought out as many other details of the ancient stationery in wood that I have so often had occasion to examine.

SE. edge of terminal basin.

On May 7 I visited, from Camp 172, the watch-tower T. vi. d, the last of the line to the southwest. As the intervening ground was quite impracticable bog, a considerable détour had to be made to the south, necessitating a ride of fully 10 miles to reach it. It took me round a great open bay of the terminal basin, where I passed a number of springs with fairly drinkable water that gathered on sandy soil covered with thin reed beds. It was of interest to notice the short ridges of drift-sand up to about 15 feet in height which lined the spring-fed channels draining towards the great marsh bed. They were evidently due to the narrow strips of scrubby vegetation, kept alive by the springs, which detained the drift-sand and caused it to be piled up by the winds. These fixed dunes seemed to illustrate clearly, though on a small scale, the formation of the big ridges of sand, or 'Dawāns', which, as I have often mentioned, accompany all the courses, dried up or still existing, of the rivers that pass through, or lose themselves in, the Taklamakān and Lop deserts.¹¹

Watch-tower T. vi. d.



All this low open ground was completely overlooked by the tower T. vi. d (see sketch below), though the isolated clay terrace, or 'witness', on which it stood did not rise to a height greater than about 40 feet. Its top was just large enough to afford room for the base, 20 feet square. The tower was built of layers of stamped clay, with reeds inserted at short intervals, and had remained practically intact, rising to a height of about 30 feet. On the top, which tapered to about 13 or 14 feet square, a brick parapet survived; but this could not be examined as it was impossible to climb up without appliances. On the east face of the tower shallow footholds were visible which must have helped the watchmen when clambering up by means of a rope. On the same face, and at a height of about 10 feet

from the ground, several Toghrak beams emerged from the masonry, supporting a mass of clay which may possibly have been intended as a rest for a ladder.

⁸ Cf. Pelliot, *La colonie sogdienne de la région du Lob Nor*, *J. Asiat.*, janvier-février 1916, pp. 115 sqq.; regarding the Lop localities mentioned in connexion with this colony, see also above, pp. 306, 327.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰ The damage in the middle of the edge on the right side was caused by an accidental hit with the *ketman* in the course of digging.

¹¹ See above, pp. 241, 451 (note 2 for further references).