

able to ascertain the interesting fact that this marshy depression had no surface connexion with the Su-lo Ho bed, which runs north of it deeply sunk in the ground like a hidden fosse. The same proved to be the case also with regard to other marsh-filled depressions as far east as T. xvii. The line of the wall was picked up again at a point where it faces the watch-tower T. xii. a across the marsh. There it descends from the edge of a broad gravel-covered plateau and was traceable till it disappeared among thick reed-beds that lay some 16 feet above the level then actually reached by the open water of the marsh. From this point the wall ran unbroken across the bare gravel 'Sai' for close on two miles to the watch-tower T. xiii. This (Fig. 180) was found in relatively fair preservation, with débris about 8 feet high that marked the position of small quarters adjoining it on the east and south. The tower was built of bricks of the same size as at T. xii, and with the same arrangement of the masonry. Its base measured 23 feet square, and its actual top reached a height of 24 feet above the level of the floor. When the débris was cleared from the small apartments immediately adjoining the tower on the east and south, I found that the face of its masonry retained several layers of plaster where it had been covered up by the walls of the quarters. Thus these are clearly proved to be a later addition.

The plan in Plate 38 illustrates the disposition of these rooms, of which the largest measured 13 by 8 feet. Fig. 180 shows them in course of excavation. A flight of stairs, built between room i and the east face of the tower, had once led up to the roof of the quarters, and thence probably to the top. Its steps, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, still retained the blocks of Toghrak wood with which they had been faced. Small recesses in the walls of rooms i, ii, and iii (the first is not shown in the plan through an oversight) served probably as cupboards for stores. Among the Chinese records found in the rooms, two slips furnish exact dates, *Doc.* No. 399 showing that of 56 B.C. and No. 400 that of A.D. 5. No. 401 (Plate XII) contains a reference to 'the *Tang-ku* company of Yü-mên', and the chief of this station is mentioned also in No. 399.

But of particular interest are the two private letters written on very fine greyish silk, *Doc.* Nos. 398, 398 a (Plate XX), which had been sewn up into the inner lining of a small silk bag, T. xiii. i. 003. a. For an account of the condition in which they were found, and to which their good preservation is, no doubt, due, reference may be made to the Descriptive List in Chapter XX, section vii. The two letters are addressed to an officer serving on the Tun-huang Limes by another employed far away on the northern frontier. They throw curious sidelights on the life led by such official exiles, besides furnishing us with actual specimens of an ancient writing-material which was previously known only from textual evidence, such as that quoted in connexion with the invention of paper.⁹

The miscellaneous finds in the ruined quarters comprise a number of carved wooden brackets, variants of the type already described (T. xiii. i. 001, Plate LIV); several seal-cases in wood, one, T. xiii. ii. 003 (Plate LIII), still retaining the clay of the sealing; a bronze arrow-head fitted with three barbs, representing an unusual pattern, T. xiii. 005 (Plate LIII); a much-used broom of split cane, T. xiii. iii. 001, etc. At a distance of about 70 yards to the south of the watch-tower there survived remains of stacks of fascines, just like those described at T. xii. a, but far more decayed. Here, too, the intervals between the stacks arranged in rows crossing at right angles averaged about 16 yards.

Immediately to the east of T. xiii the ground dips into a shallow depression about 15 feet lower, and perhaps owing to the shelter thus afforded the line of the wall has survived here in a remarkable state of preservation, as seen in Fig. 176. For about 200 yards its height still rises to 10 or 11 feet, while the gravel and sand heaped up along its base may cover another 3 feet

⁹ See above, pp. 676 sq.