

Records of
A. D. 17.

of wooden records from the time of Wang Mang. Instead of forming a kind of window to some underground chamber, as I had at first suspected, it proved to be the only access to a well or shaft measuring 6' 4" by 5' 4" in plan. It was cleared to a depth of 12 feet from the level of the tunnel without reaching the bottom. The earth roof of the shaft, which may have originally been supported by timber, fell in during the excavation, luckily without smothering any one. In the loose sand which filled the whole of the shaft there turned up dozens of wooden slips, almost all fragments so badly decayed through damp as to be illegible and to permit of handling only with the greatest care. On two of them, however, now *Doc.* Nos. 368, 369, Chiang Ssü-yeh was able to recognize a date of Wang Mang's reign corresponding to A. D. 17. No. 370, mentioning an officer commanding a thousand horse, also was found here. It is highly probable that all these remains of records came from some refuse-heap of Wang Mang's time and were gradually carried into the shaft by the winds which filled it up with drift-sand. As there was no hope, owing to the increasing damp, of any records or other perishable relics having survived further down, I did not sacrifice the time and labour needed for a complete clearing.

Shaft probably used
as dungeon.

The original purpose of this curious excavation puzzled me very much until Chiang Ssü-yeh and some of my Muhammadans put forward the suggestion that it may have been intended for a dungeon, the use of similar wells for the safe keeping of dangerous prisoners being still remembered in Chinese Turkestan. In the Central-Asian khanates, too, the survival of such methods of burying prisoners as it were alive is attested until the advent of Russian rule. No doubt, they could be paralleled from other parts of the East. If this explanation is right—and its correctness appears to me very probable—the narrow side opening or tunnel near the top of the well must have served as an air-hole and for admitting the prisoner, his food, etc. The fact that one of the inscribed slips recovered from the very mouth of this tunnel, T. XIV. i. 23, *Doc.*, No. 382 (Plate XII), has proved to refer to the burial of a man who had died after having been beaten recalls the horrors which this dungeon may have witnessed. It is a curious coincidence that the well-preserved wooden beating-stick, T. XIV. iii. 0018 (Plate LII), 20 inches long and of traditional Chinese shape,^{3a} with a two-inch wide blade and a handle, was discovered in a refuse-heap only about 20 yards to the east of the well.

Documents
dated 96-
94 B. C.

It was by the side of this rubbish layer, T. XIV. iii, that one of the very scanty indications of the structures once occupying this hillock came to light. It consisted of the foundations of a brick-built wall about 2½ feet wide and traceable for about 9 feet, with remains of steps leading up from the slope north-eastwards. The clearing of the refuse close by yielded over five dozen wooden records, some complete, of which M. Chavannes has been able to publish thirty-four (*Doc.* Nos. 304-37). Out of the six datable pieces not less than five, *Doc.* Nos. 304-6, 308, 309, belong to the years 96-94 B. C., thus conclusively proving that the occupation of this site went back to the time when the Limes was first established. One of them, *Doc.* No. 305, together with the sixth dated document, No. 307, an excellently preserved label of the year A. D. 14, will be referred to below as affording valuable evidence about the location of the 'Jade Gate'. Others, too, are of antiquarian interest. Among inscribed pieces found here I may mention also the wooden ink-seal, T. XIV. iii. 17 (Plate LIII), bearing the characters *ch'ang shou*, 'prolonged old age'. The refuse layers, T. XIV. iv, vii, found further east and partly on the slope of the hillock, were extensive, but did not prove equally rich in records and miscellaneous relics. The only clearly dated record, *Doc.* No. 355, is of the year A. D. 4. A layer of thickly-packed bundles of reeds, about 15 feet long, which was found near viii, looked as if it had served for the foundation of a wall. Remains of a brick wall could be traced for about 9 feet

^{3a} Cf. the sticks carried by the gaolers in the scene from S'akyamuni's Life shown (quite in Chinese style) by the

Ch'ien-fo-tung banner Ch. IV. 0011 (below, chap. XXIII. sec. iv; xxv. sec. ii; *Desert Cathay*, II. Pl. VI).