

present state of our knowledge to make guesses as to the origin and race of the particular trader to whose hand we owe this interesting relic of the ancient silk trade across Central Asia. But it is important to note that the writing is not Kharoṣṭhī, the script which our oldest previously known Central-Asian records of non-Chinese origin and secular character show, but Brāhmī, a script the early use of which in Central Asia we might otherwise have been inclined to connect with Buddhist religion and literature. From the language of the short document—probably the oldest extant specimen of Indian writing as yet known, as distinct from inscriptions—we may conclude that a Prākṛit mixed with Sanskrit words must have been used for purposes of secular record in the region where the trader in question was born or settled. If Sir George Grierson is right in connecting the term *giṣṭi* > *giṭṭh* with the 'Piśāca' language group, its use here might point to the region where these languages or their influence are traceable. But the area thus covered is a very wide one, extending perhaps from the vicinity of Kābul in the west all along the Hindukush and K'un-lun as far east as Khotan.⁶ In the second place, the fact that this relic of the early silk export from the interior of China to the West has been found at a ruined watch-station of the Limes well away from the ancient trade route to Lou-lan deserves special notice. In connexion with some other observations it raises a question of wider antiquarian interest, to which I shall have to return further on.

Before, however, examining this, it is desirable to review here briefly the miscellaneous objects other than written records which were recovered from the several rubbish layers of T. xv. a. The fact that they are datable in chronological succession adds to the antiquarian usefulness of these finds and may help hereafter to determine questions of detail which cannot be touched upon here. This applies in particular to the fragments of figured silk fabrics, T. xv. a. 002; iii. 0010 (Plate LV). A comparison of them with decorated silks of the late T'ang period from the 'Thousand Buddhas' of Tun-huang, on the one hand, and with the plentiful fine brocades of Han times, recovered on my third journey from Lou-lan cemeteries, on the other, is likely to prove instructive.^{6a} With these textile specimens may be classed the elaborately woven shoe, T. xv. a. i. 006 (Plate LIV), showing among its varied materials a covering of figured silk and throughout great skill in manufacture. For a detailed account of the technique, reference may be made to the Descriptive List in Chapter XX below.

Fragments of lacquered wooden bowls were found in abundance (see T. xv. a. i. 001, 005; ii. 001, 003, 004, 006; iii. 001, 009; v. 004). Numerous, too, are wooden seal-cases of different types (T. xv. a. 001; i. 002; ii. 005; iii. 002, 003; v. 005, see Plate LIII). T. xv. a. i. 009 (Plate LIV) is a well-preserved game trap, the use of which is explained by the information supplied by Mr. T. A. Joyce in the Descriptive List. A strange little object, the character of which has not yet been settled, is the wooden arrow-head (?), T. xv. a. iii. 008. A very curious find made here is the small closely tied bundle containing the broken pieces of two feathered reed arrows, with one bronze arrow-head still packed away amongst them, T. xv. a. vi. 001 (Plate LIII). The most likely explanation of its origin is that, in accordance with a system still practised by military departments anxious to check petty defalcation or waste, these arrows no longer fit for use had to be returned 'into store' before they could be replaced by new issues. To put it into proper official language, it was a case of 'one arrow-head (broken) returned in support of indent for a new one'.⁷

⁶ Cf. e.g. Grierson, *Paiśācī, Piśācas, and 'Modern Piśāca'*, *Z.D.M.G.*, 1912, pp. 72 sqq.

^{6a} The pattern in the fragment T. xv. a. iii. 0010 (Pl. LV) is of special interest, as it is closely allied to that in Ch. 00118 (see below, chap. xxiv. sec. ii) and helps to prove the early date of this remarkable piece, unique among the Ch'ien-fo-tung textiles.

⁷ I was amused to see that this little find with its obvious explanation, as set forth in *Desert Cathay*, ii. p. 127, had received due attention on the part of the writer who in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1917, January, p. 87, humorously describes the initiation of future officers of the New Armies into such time-honoured military routine.

Figured silk fabrics from T. xv. a.

Miscellaneous objects from T. xv. a.

Broken arrows returned into store.