swift messengers, are occasionally mentioned. One document which speaks of a *pho-nya*, or 'messenger', is impressed with a seal showing a rider galloping. It looks almost like a stamp ensuring quick service.

Several letters are of an entirely intimate and familiar character, and there is hardly a single piece where the personal tone is altogether wanting. Inquiries after health are found continually, and joy is expressed at good news or at the expectation to see the other's 'good face' (once 'his face which looks like sun and moon') again. Good wishes for health or long life generally conclude the letters. We get the impression that many of these phrases have become conventional. There are some letters which contain nothing besides such conventional phrases. We must not forget, however, that in most of these letters we have before us the correspondence of a number of high officials who may have been closely related to one another, besides being related to the royal family. In Ladakh we know for certain that the royal family intermarried with the families of high ministers. In Ladakh the title or name *btsan*, *btsan-po*, would indicate that a certain person was descended from the royal family. I suspect that all those ministers mentioned in the documents whose names show the syllable *btsan* were related to royalty. But on the whole we get the impression that not only the high officials, but a great part of the population, knew reading and writing. A cook as well as a baker are found among the addressed persons, and peasants write letters to the court when they wish to accuse a certain person.

Special terms of civility found in the documents are the following: the writer speaks of himself as 'I, a bad one' (*bdag-ngan-pa*); he places his letter before the feet of the addressed person (*zha-sngar* seems to be an abbreviation of *zhabs-sngar*); a ruler is greeted with the wish, 'may your helmet remain firm!'

It is of interest that a number of documents contain fragments of the Tibetan alphabet. They may represent portions of copy-books used by beginners in the art of reading and writing. They are, of course, of great importance, because they belong to times not long after the alleged invention of the Tibetan alphabet by Thon-misambhota. From the fragments we learn that the old alphabet was hardly different from the alphabet of thirty letters as used nowadays. . . . Two of the documents of the Stein Collection seem to be a fragment of a syllabary. They contain repetitions of the same consonant, furnished with all four vowel-signs and the Anusvāra.

A particular class of documents seems to refer to the distribution of fields, probably after the conquest of a new district. There we find personal names or titles followed by a numeral referring to '*dor* of field'. The word *dor* is not known from other Tibetan literature, but it is evident that in the documents of the Stein Collection it is the name of a measure of area. As regards agriculture, the documents mention the following occupations: *zhing-pa* seems to be an ordinary field-labourer, *chun-pa* is the person who irrigates the fields. Ploughing of the fields and threshing of the grain is repeatedly mentioned. Punishment is announced for all who let the water dry up (*chab-rkam-bgyid-pa*). The most remarkable discovery is, however, that 'maps of the fields' (*zhing-'agod* = *zhing-bkod*) are referred to in one of the documents [cf. M. I. iv. 93].

A certain number of wooden documents are furnished with a carefully cut socket at one end of the tablet. As we know from a few better-preserved specimens, this deepening was filled with clay, and a seal was probably impressed on the latter. As regards the writing found on these documents furnished with seals, it never contains much beyond addresses. This leads me to believe that what remains now is never the complete document. The wooden boards may represent only the cover of the paper document which was originally packed between them.[5] As, however, writing-material was rare in Turkestan, the wooden documents were used several times, the old writing being scratched off to make room for a new text. Thus the documents furnished with deepenings for seals may also have been used again for less important documents, and several of them appear like ordinary labels.

Paper must have been a rather rare article, for we find it occasionally mentioned as a little present offered to the addressee, if the latter was in a high position. The custom not to approach a person in a high position without a little present was apparently in vogue in those early days. Most of the paper documents contain different letters on their two sides, and there are a few palimpsests in the collection.

Regarding measures, the following may be gathered from the documents: a *khal* is a horse-load; a *srang*

[5] Judging from the shape of these small tablets and the analogy of many Chinese documents of the Han period found along the ancient Tun-huang Limes, it seems more probable that missives of this kind were meant merely to authenticate verbal messages and orders which the person carrying the tablets was to deliver. [Cf. M. I. vii. 76.]—STEIN.