

a cutting into the hard clay composing it. It proved to be the mouth of a little tunnel, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet square in section, running horizontally into the mound and filled with drift-sand, straw, and refuse.<sup>3</sup> Before it was possible for me to form any view about its purpose, twenty-three Chinese slips of wood (see *Doc.* Nos. 367-88) had emerged among blank pieces of wooden stationery, grass matting, bones, and other refuse. The further part of the tunnel proved to be filled with drift-sand, and, after burrowing in for some 10 feet, the digger reported that he had reached a small apartment also full of sand. There work had to stop for the time.

Encouraged by this unexpected discovery and the reward it had brought him, my 'prospector' continued eagerly his search of the slope, and, joined by one of my Turkī servants, before long succeeded in unearthing the remains of a platform or small apartment, T. XIV. ii, cut into the clay rock lower down and only some 16 yards off. Here close on a score of wooden records were brought to light, together with a large number of inscribed 'shavings'. One of the pieces found here, T. XIV. ii. 1, though its writing proved to be completely obliterated, had an archaeological interest of its own because it was of exactly the same shape as the Kharoṣṭhī wedge covers, with the square socket cut for the seal but no longer retaining its clay. Another piece, T. XIV. ii. 2 (*Doc.* No. 341, Plate XI), looked like an adaptation of the same shape for use as a label, and soon proved of special interest on account of the high rank of the sender it mentions. But to this, and to the import of other records contained among these first finds, I shall have to return further on.

The rapid preliminary examination which Chiang Ssū-yeh was able to effect on the spot soon showed that, among the records discovered in the tunnel, there were several dating from Wang Mang's period (A.D. 9-19; see *Doc.* Nos. 367, 371, 372), while two of those found at ii (*Doc.* Nos. 338, 339) seemed to date from the years 48-45 B.C. But what at the outset justified particular interest in this site was that quite a number of these documents evidently referred to officers connected with the 'Yü-mên barrier', and that several of them emanated from, or were addressed to, dignitaries of obviously higher rank than those with which the petty records of ordinary watch-stations along the Limes were usually concerned. The general topographical facts detailed at the beginning of this section, and certain archaeological observations I shall have to discuss presently, had already before made me realize that this site must have been a point of considerable importance for the western end of the Limes and the route leading along it. In fact, their evidence, combined with any indications that could be gathered from the documentary finds, soon led me to conclude that the 'Jade Gate', as it existed since the commencement of the first century B.C. down to Later Han times, had to be located at this site.

I was anxious, therefore, to have the remains on that unpretentious hillock cleared with all expedition and thoroughness. Fortunately, my small band of diggers received just then an opportune reinforcement in the shape of a dozen additional Chinese labourers brought up from Tun-huang. Even thus it cost three days' continuous work to finish the task. The hillock to be cleared measured about a hundred yards from east to west, and nearly as much across. There was nothing to guide us in the search for ancient remains and refuse. So parallel trenches had to be dug all along the slopes down to the natural hard clay, which was usually hidden under detritus at a depth of 2 or 3 feet from the surface, in order to make quite sure that nothing was overlooked at this important point. The same had to be done on the fairly level top, which measured about 120 feet in either direction.

In describing the results of these labours I may first mention the curious discovery made as regards the narrow tunnel on the north-west slope, at the mouth of which I had found that batch

Chinese documents at T. XIV. ii.

Records suggest location of Jade Gate.

Clearing of hillock.

Tunnel leading to shaft.

<sup>3</sup> In the photograph, Fig. 179, the man on the extreme left is seen standing above the mouth of the tunnel. In Pl. 40 it is marked by i.