

or two. It was only later, after the remarkable rubbish-heap to be mentioned presently had yielded up its antiquarian treasures, that the explanation, as definite as it was simple, revealed itself. Those curious seal-bearing tablets were meant to serve as a kind of wooden cover or envelope fitting between the raised rims of the wooden tablets which bore on their protected upper surface the text of a letter or legal document.

The sand covering the remains of this structure which had proved so rich a mine of inscribed tablets, was not deep enough to protect relics of larger size, but the ruin itself (Fig. 37) served well to illustrate the extent to which this and other structures of the site had suffered from wind erosion. The small plateau which the ruin is seen to occupy, raised some fifteen feet above the surrounding ground, is unmistakably due to this destructive force. While the strip of ground actually covered by the debris, foundation beams of walls, etc., has retained the original level, the open surface near has been lowered more and more by the eroding action of the wind. That part of the ground, too, which is still occupied by remains of ancient structures, is slowly being cut into and undermined. The photograph taken of the ruin aptly illustrates this slow process of destruction; for the heavy timber debris seen on the slope of the foreground mark a portion of the original building which has completely fallen.

The danger to ruins which is involved in this slow but incessant action of wind-driven sand, was strikingly brought home to me by the condition of more than one group of ancient dwellings explored at this site. Thus half a mile to the north-west of the building first cleared an area measur-