

my hopes of further archaeological finds had to be based mainly on any rubbish remains. These hopes were soon confirmed in a very gratifying way.

In the course of a reconnaissance to the north I had sighted about half a dozen more groups of ruined structures scattered over an area of about three and a half miles from south to north and more than two miles across. In one ruin, greatly decayed and in no way attracting special attention, I had come upon a number of bleached tablets lying exposed, and a little digging had within half an hour brought to light more than two dozen inscribed pieces. Among them were two novelties: a narrow slip of wood with Chinese characters and a small fragment of leather with a line of Kharoshthi recording a date.

These finds were indeed promising. Yet I little anticipated how rich a mine of ancient relics I had struck within the half-broken walls of this room which once formed the western end of a modest dwelling-place (Fig. 36). When systematic excavation had begun it revealed layer upon layer of wooden tablets mixed up with refuse of all sorts. It soon proved to be an ancient rubbish-heap formed by the accumulations of many years and containing also what, by an anachronism, may fitly be called the 'waste-paper' deposits of that early time.

From that consolidated mass of refuse rising fully four feet above the original level I recovered in the end more than two hundred documents on wood. They were all embedded among solid layers of broken pottery, straw, rags of felt and various woven fabrics, pieces of leather, and other less savoury refuse. It was not an easy task with fingers half-numbed by cold, and in the dust which a fresh north-