

During the few days of my stay at Khotan much of my time was taken up with the inspection of the coins, terra-cotta figures, and other antiquities that were brought for sale by villagers and "treasure-seekers." Most of the bagfuls contained only the broken pottery and copper coins found so plentifully at Yotkan, and already fairly well known from previously formed collections. But their inspection was a useful training to me, and I thought it advisable to make at first ample purchases so as to stimulate the zest of professional searchers.

I was naturally on the look-out too for those "old books" written or "block-printed" in a variety of unknown characters which, as already mentioned, had during the last five or six years been sold from Khotan in increasing numbers to European collectors at Kashgar. In regard to these acquisitions the suspicion of forgery had before presented itself to competent scholars, but evidence was wanting to substantiate it, and in the meantime these strange texts continued to be edited and analysed in learned publications. Offers in this article were surprisingly scanty at Khotan itself, and curiously enough the very first "old book" that was shown to me supplied unmistakable proof of forgery. Hearing of my presence at the place, a Russian Armenian from Kokand brought me for inspection a manuscript on birch-bark, consisting of some ten ragged leaves covered with an "unknown" script. He had bought it for forty roubles, undoubtedly as a commercial speculation, and now wished to have his treasure properly appraised.

I saw at once that the birch-bark leaves had never received the treatment which ancient Bhurja manuscripts, well known to me from Kashmir, invariably show. Nor had the forger attempted to reproduce the special ink which is needed for writing on birch-bark. So when I applied the "water test" the touch of a wet finger sufficed to take away the queer "unknown characters" both written and block-printed. It was