

the ground in the photograph opposite) had bleached and partly effaced the fully exposed writing of the topmost tablets.

My first task was to put a guard over the place where Ibrahim had scattered these precious finds, so as to prevent further injury or abstraction. Then the men were set to work to clear the room where he had first come upon them. It was an easy matter, as the room measured only 14 by 16 feet, and the sand which covered its floor was not deep. On the north side, near the eroded slope, it only lay to a depth of about 2 feet, which increased to about 4 feet towards the south wall. While this clearing proceeded, I had time to examine more carefully the character of the whole structure. It was essentially one based on the use of timber, which the forest land along the river and the plantations of 'Terek' or white poplar subsequently traced at many points of the ancient site must have supplied in abundance. Massive wooden beams, which surprised my workmen by their thickness and perfect finish, formed a kind of foundation. On this were set wooden posts about 4 inches square, which supported the roof and at the same time served as a frame for the walls. These and smaller intermediary posts, fixed at regular intervals of about a foot, were joined by light cross-beams, of which some were still found in position. To this framework was fixed a strong kind of matting of tamarisk branches woven diagonally, which again was covered on each side with layers of hard, white plaster of varying thickness. The walls had completely decayed where not actually covered by sand, but most of the posts originally holding them, now bleached and splintered, still rose high above the surface.

As the room was gradually cleared, about two dozen inscribed tablets were found at various points of the original floor and on the raised platform that flanked the fireplace on the west. There was nothing to indicate whether they had been separated from the main deposit of documents which Ibrahim had lighted upon in the recess at the south-west corner of the room. The careful search which I then made myself for the scattered remains of his find, resulted in the recovery of no less than eighty-five tablets, and as the clearing