

seemed indeed to point to contents of a more practical nature—letters, perhaps, and contracts or documents of some official character. I knew well that the historical and antiquarian interest of the finds, if they were really to furnish such records, would be increased beyond all proportion. Yet the supposition seemed almost too good to be readily indulged in.

Once in the comparative shelter of my tent, as soon as the detailed account of the first excavations had been written up, I began with impatience to compare and study the best preserved of those remarkable tablets. I knew from the experience furnished by the Dutreuil de Rhins fragments and more than one Kharoshthi stone inscription from the Punjab, how serious a task the proper decipherment of these documents would necessarily prove even to the epigraphist working in his study. I was thus prepared for the exceptional difficulties likely to be presented by the cursive character of the writing and all the uncertainties as to the language and contents. Yet sitting up that evening wrapped in my furs until the increasing cold drove me to seek refuge in bed—the thermometer showed next morning a minimum of 9° Fahr. below zero—I gained assurance on two important points.

A series of philological observations bearing on the phonetic value of the characters, single or compound, that could be read with certainty, and on the recurrence of particular inflectional endings, &c., convinced me that the language was an early Indian Prakrit, probably of a type closely akin to the dialect found in the legends of the oldest Khotan coins and in the Dutreuil de Rhins fragments. It became equally certain from a cursory comparison of the tablets that their text varied greatly both in extent and in matter, notwithstanding the brief initial formula with which most of them opened. It was only some days later that I succeeded in definitely deciphering the latter, when its wording—*mahanuava maharaya lihati*, “His Highness the Maharaja writes [thus]:”—plainly established that these particular documents conveyed official orders. In the meantime, however, the previous observations together with others, such as the occurrence of numerical figures