

CHAPTER XI

THE ANCIENT SITE BEYOND THE NIYA RIVER

SECTION I.—THE RUIN N. 1. AND THE FIRST FINDS OF INSCRIBED TABLETS

Ibrāhīm's
find-place of
Kharoṣṭhī
tablets.

AT sunrise of January 28, with the temperature still well below zero Fahr., I hastened to the ruined building where Ibrāhīm had a year previously picked up his ancient tablets inscribed with Kharoṣṭhī characters. According to his statement, he had left plenty more of them *in situ*. It had been impossible to hide from him the value which I attached to these records; and as he subsequently seemed to regret not having himself made a haul of them, I had him watched *en route* by Ibrāhīm Ākhūn, the excellent Darōgha whose services the Amban of Keriya had placed at my disposal, and also after our arrival, to prevent his escape or any possible interference with the spot. The mingled feelings of expectation and distrust with which I now approached it, soon changed to joyful assurance. About one mile to the east of the camp I sighted the ruin (marked N. 1. on the plan) to which Ibrāhīm was guiding us, on what looked like a small terrace or plateau rising 12-15 feet above the eroded ground near by¹. On ascending the west slope, seen in the foreground of Fig. 37, I picked up at once three tablets inscribed with Kharoṣṭhī lying amidst the débris of massive timber which marked wholly eroded parts of the ruined structure. On reaching the top I found to my delight many more scattered about in the sand within the nearest of the rooms still clearly traceable by remains of their walls. The layer of drift-sand that had spread over the tablets since Ibrāhīm had thrown them down here a year before, was so thin as scarcely to protect the topmost ones from the snow that lay about one inch deep over the more shaded portions of the ground. It dated, no doubt, from the snowfall which I had encountered on my way from Keriya to Niya eight days earlier.

Original
place of
discovery in
ruin N. 1.

Ibrāhīm seemed scarcely less elated than myself at seeing his statement confirmed, and the good reward I had promised him thus assured. He at once pointed out to me that the find-place of the relics was not in this room, marked *v. a.* in my detail plan Pl. XXVIII, where he had thrown them away in utter ignorance of their value, but in the south corner of the room *i.* immediately adjoining eastwards. There, in a little recess (*a*) about 4 feet wide, formed between the fireplace, well recognizable above the sand, and the wall dividing rooms *i.* and *v. a.* (seen on the right in Plate VI), he had come upon a heap of tablets while scooping out the sand with his hands in search of 'treasure'. The ancient documents which he appears to have found lying in horizontal rows, possibly with some sort of arrangement, on the low mud platform extending along that side of the room, impeded his burrowing, and were hence promptly thrown across the decayed wall into the next room. It was a fortunate chance which had brought me to the site so soon after his discovery. For, fully exposed to the sun and wind, these thin wooden boards could not have long retained their writing in such wonderful freshness as they had during their safe

¹ The photograph, Fig. 37, taken after excavation from the height of a large tamarisk-covered sandhill to the north-east, well illustrates the position of the ruin. The rooms of the

north wing are seen in front, and behind them to the left the remains of the east wing. For the patches of snow lying on the north slopes of dunes, see below.