

stained and discoloured surface of a number of otherwise well-preserved tablets. The compact little heap comprising the tablets numbered N. iv. 46-60 had fared better; for lying close to the centre of the south wall (in the position marked *c* in the plan) they had received some protection from what remained of the foot of the wall, and those lying nearest to the flooring had helped to keep off the damp from the rest. The documents contained in this accumulation, and some minor batches near by, had probably remained undisturbed just as they were thrown down by the last occupants of the dwelling. With regard to the few tablets (N. iv. 80-84) which were found scattered on the east platform and on the floor immediately below it, this seemed less likely, and it was manifestly not the case with the very numerous pieces that rewarded the subsequent clearing of the central area.

Outside its edges and well above the floor there turned up the tablets N. iv. 99-106 to the south, and N. iv. 107-114 to the east. As the passages between the platforms and the posts marking the central area were being cleared, it was found that the latter was covered by a square piece of heavy tamarisk matting lying about one foot above the floor; as the size of this matting corresponded to that of the area itself, and as some light rafters were found lying below it, it had evidently once belonged to the roof over this area. The roof must have fallen in at this point when the sand had already accumulated one foot, and the twenty odd tablets found above the matting near the posts marking the southern end of the area (N. iv. 115-141) could only have got there subsequently. It is probable that they were thrown there when the abandoned dwelling was visited by some one searching its ruins after the fashion of the modern 'treasure-seekers'. It was not likely that the ancient wooden records left behind by the last occupiers as so much 'waste-paper' (to use an anachronism) would have been treated by him with more respect than Ibrāhīm had shown for the collection of tablets he had unearthed in N. i. Below the matting I found only four tablets (N. iv. 142-145), but these are in a very good state of preservation, as might be expected from the early and effective protection afforded them. One of them (N. iv. 144), a rectangular under-tablet, shows thirteen long lines of perfectly clear writing, and thus offers a text of respectable extent. A small oval-shaped platform of plaster, rising about 6 in. above the floor, which was after this disclosed within the central area, must, judging from the rim enclosing it, have served as an open fireplace.

Inscribed
tablets from
central area.

The epigraphical finds of N. iv. were no less remarkable for their variety in shape and size than for their number. The wedge-shaped tablets familiar from N. i. reappeared here again, two complete double-wedges (N. iv. 108, 120) being recovered, besides four detached under-tablets and seven covering-tablets of the same type, all from within the central area⁷. But in numbers they were far surpassed by inscribed boards of wood to which, notwithstanding great variations in shape and proportions, the general designation of 'oblong' seems applicable. Three among them (N. iv. 33, 46, also the fragment N. iv. 17. c) showed the familiar shape of the 'Takhti', the handle being either pentagonal or rounded, as seen in N. iv. 33 (Plate CIII). The latter specimen, badly faded in its writing, still retains the string for which the hole always found in the handle was intended. The arrangement of the lines here, as in almost all Takhtis where the writing runs parallel to the longer side, shows that the handle was meant to be grasped in the left hand whichever side was uppermost⁸.

Variety of
shapes in
tablets.

No classification into particular types can be attempted for the great mass of the oblong

⁷ Under-tablets N. iv. 105, 107, 111, 117; covering-tablets N. iv. 80, 109, 119, 121, 134, 135, 137. For the well-preserved clay seal shown by N. iv. 80, comp. Plate

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⁸ Comp. Mr. Andrews' note on N. iii. 1 in list.