

SECTION II.—EXCAVATION OF ANCIENT RESIDENCES, N. II, N. III, N. IV.

Group of
ruined
structures,
N. II.

Evidence of
excessive
erosion.

Finds of
inscribed
tablets in
N. v.

The short reconnaissances on which I had sent out the Surveyor and some of my own men immediately after our arrival had shown the existence of remains of ancient dwellings at various parts of the site. The large group of ruined structures, marked N. II on the plan (Plate XXVII), had been sighted by myself from some high dunes between N. I and the camp, and as it lay only about half a mile to the north-east of the latter I proceeded to examine it on January 30. The condition of the remains which I found here scattered over an area roughly measuring 430 ft. from north to south and 470 ft. from east to west (see sketch-plan in Plate XXIX), was an apt demonstration of the danger to ruins involved in erosion. As the panoramic view (Fig. 39) taken from the south shows, splintered posts marking the position of ancient structures were seen rising at many points between and above the light dunes covering the area. But in most of the ruins the sand lay only to a height of 1-2 feet or even less, and wherever it was removed it soon became evident that the interior as well as the walls had, long before this cover of sand came, been eroded to the very foundations. A look at the cleared structures in the foreground and on the left side of the photograph will demonstrate how little chance there was of any antiques surviving within the lines of posts that had long ceased to be walls and to afford protection. Near the edges of the area, and also within it, erosion had cut away and scooped out much of the ground, leaving the ruins bordered by sharply-marked banks, as clearly seen on the right of the photograph. In the débris scattered here over the slopes it was easy to recognize the fallen posts and foundations of structures that had otherwise completely disappeared, and to realize the final stage of destruction awaiting the rest of the ruins.

Some low dunes, rising to about 6-8 feet above the original ground-level, stretched across the ruined area in the direction from NNE. to SSW.; but the excavation of the remains near the eastern edge, which they covered better than any others, proved that even here erosion had done its work thoroughly. In a large dwelling (see sketch-plan) the timber and plaster walls of two rooms still stood to a height of 2-3 feet, owing to the support afforded by a mud platform and a fireplace, but no objects of any kind were found in these or the other rooms. It was hence the more gratifying when, on clearing a small detached structure (N. v.) situated about 50 feet to the south-west, a considerable number of inscribed wooden tablets came to light from below the thin cover of sand, only about $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 foot deep. Three large posts, visible in the photograph, seemed to mark a central area provided originally with a raised roof; but as no trace of walls or platforms could be discovered, the interior arrangement of the room remains doubtful. Owing to the poor protection afforded against atmospheric influences the majority of the fifty odd tablets found here had withered and bleached until all trace of writing was lost. The wood of many had perished so completely that they broke at the slightest touch and could not be removed. Among the numerous tablets which turned up along the eastern part of the central area only those marked N. v. 1-6 retained part of their original writing or were capable of removal. Even in their case the surface of the wood was invariably much bleached, rotten, or otherwise damaged. The few pieces found further west, among them N. v. 7-10, had suffered equally. On the northern edge of the central area, where the sand lay slightly deeper, the tablets brought to light (N. v. 12-20) did not show quite so much the effects of exposure, but their wood, even where relatively well preserved, appears badly discoloured.