

Changed
aspect of
ground.

As soon as the main features of the Stūpa had been clearly recognized I hastened to proceed to the ruin N. v, the object of my next excavations. On the way I noticed a gradual change in the appearance of the ground, the broad dunes with frequent cones covered by tamarisk scrub giving way to extensive bare loess-banks between small dunes which were rarely interrupted by sand-cones. The tamarisk growth, to which the latter owed their formation, was scanty and mostly dead. Near the line where the change became marked there was the half-eroded ruin of a small structure of rush-walls, apparently a cattle-shed.

Appearance
of ruin N. v.

Promising as the finds were which my previous 'prospecting' at N. v had yielded, there was nothing in the survey of the surface remains that could lead me to anticipate how rich a deposit of ancient records I had struck in this ruin. The remains of the main structure, as seen in the photograph (Fig. 44), taken from the south and before excavation, consisted only of much decayed posts marking the walls of a few rooms and of a rush-wall strengthened by timber which had enclosed a courtyard. There was timber-débris scattered over the slopes adjoining the ruin on the north and north-east, and leading down to eroded ground from 20 to 25 ft. below the original level; but neither its quantity nor its appearance suggested that more than a modest dwelling-house had once stood here. The only feature attracting attention was the large orchard, marked by dead fruit-trees and a fence traceable in deep sand, which extended to the west and south of the structure as seen in the plan (Plate XXXII).

Condition of
room N. xv.

The small dimensions of the extant remains made it easy to let the men under Rām Singh's supervision proceed with the clearing of the rooms southward and the adjoining portions of the courtyard, while I myself, with a few of the more handy labourers, among them Ibrāhīm, concentrated my attention upon the corner room, N. xv., to the north or more correctly NNW., on the edge of which towards the eroded slope my previous search had brought to light the already mentioned finds. On carefully clearing the drift-sand from the eroded slope in the direction towards what (for brevity's sake) I may call the northern side of this room, I ascertained that owing to erosion the wall of the room on this side had disappeared almost entirely. But part of its foundation beam was found still *in situ*, and thus the original dimensions of the room, 23 by 18 ft. (including walls) could be measured. Owing to the erosion of this wall a portion of the layer of rubbish it had retained within the immediately adjoining part of the room (marked *N* on plan) had slid down the slope, and from this most of the previous finds proved to have been recovered. A careful search of the remainder furnished the inscribed tablets now marked N. xv. 30-36.

Rubbish
deposits
within N. xv.

As soon as systematic clearing had reached the area inside the north wall it revealed layers upon layers of wooden tablets embedded in a mass of what looked like old rubbish deposits mixed up with fine dust and remains of a straw-covered roof. On the top of this fairly compact mass, and clearly distinguishable from it, there lay a thin cover of drift-sand only about 1 ft. deep. It was not from this sand, but from the consolidated mass of refuse forming a bank close on 4 ft. thick above the original mud floor, that I extracted tablet after tablet. Thus the truth soon dawned upon me. I had struck an ancient rubbish-heap, formed by the accumulations of many years, and containing also what, with an anachronism, may fitly be called 'the waste-paper' deposits of that period. Fig. 45 shows a portion of the refuse stratum filling the room as seen when the clearing had proceeded to its centre, and will help to illustrate the conditions in which the epigraphic riches of this ruin were recovered.

Composi-
tion of
ancient
rubbish-
heap.

Throughout the room the documents on wood and leather, of which it yielded in the end over 250, were found, either separately or in relative proximity, scattered among layers containing broken pottery, pieces of matting and wood, straw, rags of felt and a variety of woven materials,