

In this connexion may be mentioned also the thin rectangular piece of wood, N. xv. 60 (Plate CV), which, by the evidence of its notched edges, intended to hold a string, and of the circular depression cut on one side, may be assumed to have served as a seal-cover.

The archaeological and historical importance of the seal-impressions does not require elaborate demonstration. In those made from seals of purely classical design we have the most tangible proof as yet furnished how far towards China the use of Western art products had penetrated in the early centuries of our era. Whereas in the case of engraved stones of similar make, found in the *débris* layers of Yōtkan, or otherwise recovered from Khotan sites, the period and the circumstances of their use must necessarily remain doubtful, we can here determine these within narrow limits by means of the very documents to which the seals were applied. The decipherment of these documents, it is true, has not yet proceeded sufficiently far to show us the exact functions or occupations, the place of residence, &c., of those who once attached their seals to them. But the date of the records can, as we shall see, be fixed with considerable accuracy, and there can be no doubt that they originated in the vicinity of the ancient site where they were discovered, or at least within the borders of the Khotan kingdom.

Seals  
indicating  
classical  
influence.

The fact that these documents are so closely associated in date, language, and contents, and for the greatest part have been preserved for us in the same rubbish-heap, must make us appreciate still more clearly the remarkable diversity in origin and types which their seal-impressions exhibit. The juxtaposition of classical seals with a Chinese one on records of the same office seems the best illustration of that strange mixture of influences from the Far West and the Far East which the culture of ancient Khotan witnessed. The classical seals appear all to be Roman work, dating from the third or at the earliest from the second century of our era. The documents which have preserved their impressions must, in view of the evidence discussed in the next chapter, be assigned to the middle of the third century A.D. Hence it seems safe to conclude that the trade with the distant West, which accounts for such imports, still flourished at the period preceding the abandonment of the Niya Site.

Diversity  
of seal-  
impressions.

Of Kharoṣṭhī documents on wood there remains now to be noticed only the miscellaneous class to which, when describing above the finds of N. iv., I have applied the comprehensive term of 'oblongs'. At N. xv. this class is represented by a relatively small number of tablets (37), and none among them seem to offer novel features in their outward appearance. As a general observation, I may note that pieces of imposing size, such as N. iv. and N. v. had furnished in considerable numbers, were here completely absent; while, on the other hand, narrow tablets, lath-like or resembling mere labels, were very frequent<sup>22</sup>. The peculiar way in which the rubbish contents of N. xv. had accumulated may possibly account for this difference, unless we chose to seek in it some indication of the clerical work here having differed in character from that carried on in the 'Daftars' of N. iv. and N. v. Of the few Takhtī-shaped pieces, with handles, which turned up, N. xv. 185 (reproduced in Plate CI) is the largest<sup>23</sup>. N. xv. 76+181 (see Plate CII) is curious, as showing how readily a rough bough, probably of tamarisk, could be converted into material for recording brief memos. or items of account. That such are the contents of many of these oblongs, whatever the specific modification of their shape, is rendered very probable by the frequent arrangement of their text in small columns

Oblong  
tablets.

<sup>22</sup> See in the list N. xv. 4, 20. a, 23, 28, 33, 55+81, 58, 68, 99, 120, 122, 122. a, 130, 141, 146, 172, 174, 198, 206, 335, 342, 07.

<sup>23</sup> N. xv. 92. a, 172 are the only other Takhtīs found here.