

apart from the interest of the documents themselves and their splendid preservation, the condition in which they were found was bound to furnish valuable indications. I had to master my impatience in order to have the ground in front opened out so as to permit safe and orderly removal of the tablets, and when this had been done darkness came on long before I could extract the whole of the records which lay exposed below the wall. As one large rectangular double tablet after another passed through my hands and was cleared of the adhering layer of dust, I noted with special satisfaction that with one or two exceptions they all had their elaborate string fastenings unopened and sealed down on the envelope in the regular fashion.

It was not only the state of perfect preservation of these documents and their value as fresh materials for the study of the language and the conditions of the period which delighted me. What pleased me equally was the manifest confirmation they afforded of a conjectural explanation I had arrived at in the case of a few previous finds of this kind. Several considerations had led me to suppose that these were agreements or bonds which had to be kept under their original fastening in order that in case of need their validity might be established in court. As long as the clay seal impressed in the centre of the covering tablet, and the string passing under it and holding the under and covering tablets tightly together, remained unbroken, all chance of tampering with the text written on the inner surfaces was precluded. Here was a large series of documents exactly in the same condition, carefully hidden away as deeds, bonds, and the like would be, and all of them bearing docketings which were clearly not of the usual address style. Were they deeds or agreements which the official residing in the house had in safe keeping, or did they refer to land or property of his own?

Only a full decipherment of the documents, not to be hoped for till years hence, could give the answer. But in the meantime I noted that the very exceptions seemed to support my conjecture. For when late that evening I examined the two letters on wood which alone in the