

position—for that, no doubt, was the purpose of the clay lump, as Rustam had guessed when he started his burrowing—plainly showed that the owner, Cojhbo Sojaka, in all probability, or his heir, had been obliged to leave the place in an emergency, but with a hope of returning. The absence of any provision for a covering or receptacle to protect these valued records while buried clearly suggested hurried departure, an indication with which the scattered condition of the other files of tablets left above the floor close by well agreed.

In any case it seemed difficult to account otherwise for such a *cache* and the method of marking its place. If the hole below the foundation beam had been used regularly as a sort of safe, some receptacle would have been provided, and it would scarcely have been necessary to mark its position in so obvious a fashion as long as its existence was remembered. If, on the other hand, the departure of the owner had been connected with a systematic abandonment of the site caused by a gradual failing of the irrigation water-supply through desiccation, we should have expected this collection of specially valued records to be removed with other cherished possessions, neither bulk nor weight presenting any difficulty.

It would be useless now to conjecture what particular emergency gave occasion for this hurried deposit; nor can we ever hope to learn what prevented the owner's return. But so much is certain, that a re-occupation of the settlement must have subsequently become impossible through the action of that great physical change, desiccation, which has so widely affected the scene of man's struggle with the desert all along the Taklamakan. This change, however, was gradual, and did not prevent the abandoned site from being visited and exploited during centuries before the sands finally covered up its dwellings. They must have continued to be searched, probably from the very time of the abandonment, for any objects of value or practical utility left behind. And so it was scarcely surprising that when we completed the clearing of Sojaka's residence on October 25th, some wooden utensils, such as a plainly carved cupboard and a four-footed large eating-tray, earthenware