

jars, remains of a few farmyard implements and of rugs, were the only spoil added to that plentiful harvest of inscribed tablets.

The value of the rich haul of ancient records we had made in this ruin (N. xxiv.) lay not merely in the number of individual documents, but even more, perhaps, in the remarkable state of preservation which almost all of them showed. The labours of my friend Professor E. J. Rapson, who, aided by two distinguished French confrères, MM. Senart and Boyer, undertook the decipherment and partial publication of the Kharoshthi materials brought back from my first journey, have revealed only too clearly the serious difficulties presented both by their script and their language. The obscurities arising from the very cursive form of Kharoshthi writing, otherwise known to us only from inscriptions and coins of the Indian North-West, have proved scarcely less troublesome than those due to the use of an early Prakrit dialect which differs considerably from the forms represented in Indian literature. The fact, recognized from the first, that we have in these inscribed tablets of the Niya site mainly official records or correspondence dealing with the *menus détails* of local administration and daily life, was bound to increase greatly the difficulties of interpretation.

In order to overcome these difficulties with a good chance of ultimate success, my philological collaborators needed further materials, and in particular an adequate supply of complete documents in which the state of preservation should leave no room for uncertainty as to the actually inscribed characters. The finds made in the course of my renewed explorations at this site supply such materials in plenty. But the necessity of first concentrating their efforts upon the publication of the Kharoshthi records already in hand has so far prevented Professor Rapson and his fellow-savants from giving any detailed analysis of the contents of the documents newly recovered. I must therefore content myself here with a rapid sketch of the most curious features in the 'wooden stationery' on which they are written, and with hints as to what the progress of elucidation is likely to reveal about their subject matter.