

opening of the document written on the inner sides of the two tablets or tampering with its contents was effectively prevented. At the same time it is clear that only as long as the string fastening remained intact could the seal impression on the covering tablet be appealed to as proof of the genuineness of the written contents within; for nowhere do we meet in the latter with anything that could be taken as a signature or other means of authentication.

I must refrain from touching here upon any of the fascinating questions which naturally suggest themselves in connection with finds of records such as I have just described. The area of the travels and labours which my present narrative has to cover is too great to permit space for recapitulating the conclusions to which I was led by my first explorations at this site five years earlier, and which I endeavoured to indicate in my *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan* and subsequently to set forth more fully in *Ancient Khotan*. The elaboration of the literary remains brought back from this site has not advanced sufficiently in the interval to yield fresh details which could be discussed with advantage in a personal narrative like the present. But I may note with satisfaction that neither my later work on the spot nor the researches of my philological collaborators have disclosed any features which could throw doubt on the justness of my main conclusions of historical interest.

In the light of my new finds it can still be asserted with confidence that the ruins belong to a widely scattered agricultural settlement which flourished in the third century A.D. and was abandoned when Chinese supremacy in the Tarim Basin came to an end towards the close of that century. The essential observation still holds good, that the administration of the tract was carried on in an Indian language and script. Their use lends support to the old local tradition recorded by Hsüan-tsang which tells of Khotan having received a large portion of its early population by immigration from Takshasila, the Taxila of the Greeks, in the extreme North-West of India. But since my subsequent explorations yielded proofs of Kharoshthi