

tamarisk brushwood fixed between the courses at intervals of one and a half to two feet. The walls, which on their top seemed to have had a thickness of eleven or twelve feet, were surmounted by parapets where thickly packed tamarisk layers alternated with brickwork at close intervals.

Rough, indeed, the construction of this desolate stronghold looked and lamentably bare its interior. But I could not well doubt its age when I noticed that, within the circumvallation and near the east face, wind erosion had scooped out a depression fully ten feet below what layers of stable refuse marked as the original ground level. The surface sloped down from the east wall, behind which a layer of fine gravel and sand, evidently blown across by the prevailing north-east winds, had accumulated and afforded protection. It was here and not far from the inner north-east angle that a few wooden posts, rising a foot or so above the gravel surface, had attracted Tokhta Akhun's attention when he visited the ruin in the preceding spring.

On digging down single-handed he had then come upon what seemed to be the tamarisk bundles of a roof, and discovered among them the piece of paper inscribed with Tibetan which he had brought to me at Charklik. I could not expect to find a better spot for my intended trial excavation, and lost no time about setting my men to work here on a line stretching along the east wall. The promise of small rewards for the first finds stimulated their energy, and with fifty Ketmans working away lustily a row of small apartments soon emerged from below the cover of gravel and sand. They were all built in brick, with rough posts of Toghrak wood to support a roofing made of tamarisk branches and earth above. Apart from their being ranged more or less parallel to the fort wall, the disposition of these little rooms was extremely irregular. The largest measured only sixteen by eleven feet, and some of the smaller ones had a width of scarcely five feet.

But in inverse proportion to the small size and roughness of the half-underground hovels was the richness of the rubbish which seemed to fill them to the roof. From the very start of the digging pieces of paper and wood inscribed in Tibetan cropped up in numbers (Fig. 136).