

CHAPTER XXXIII

SURVEY OF THE ANCIENT STATION

ON December 19th, in the bitter cold of the early morning, work was started with the clearing of a fairly well preserved ruin some sixty yards to the south-west of what we called the 'Ya-mên.' Neither the dimensions of the dozen rooms still traceable nor the size of the timber pieces were large here. But drift sand had accumulated within the broken walls to a height of three or four feet, and this, together with the familiar look of the ground plan and the wattle and timber construction, exactly as at the Niya site, raised hopes. They were not disappointed. It is true the first room, evidently intended with its thick walls of stamped clay, big fireplace, and broad sitting-platforms for use as a warm corner in the winter, yielded only small pieces of a carpet of well-woven ingrain material, and showing a delicate floral pattern in colours still vivid.

But in a passage dividing this from a larger room westwards we came upon three large rectangular tablets complete with their wooden covers and seal-sockets, and still retaining most of their Kharoshthi writing in excellent preservation. Two of them lay wrapped up in a piece of well-woven brown fabric, with about three feet of sand below them, having manifestly fallen into this position from some receptacle higher up on the wall. Except for the wood, which was of Toghrak instead of the cultivated poplar, these documents conformed in all details of arrangement, script, etc., to the features made so familiar by my Niya finds. As official records these rectangular tablets were sure to show a date in their opening portion, and as I looked for this eagerly I soon convinced myself