

fine particles impregnated with ammonia into one's throat and nose. Our labour was to the end amply rewarded by finds, and the men, whose attention and care I stimulated by appropriate Bakhshish for objects of special interest, reaped a good harvest for their trouble. Of Chinese records we recovered over 120, not counting small fragments (Fig. 119). The great majority were wooden 'slips' of the regular size, nearly ten inches long and half an inch wide, and many of them complete. Of Chinese paper documents, all torn pieces, but some of large size, we counted over forty. The Kharoshthi records were few, but comprised a perfectly preserved large document on paper exactly resembling in arrangement those on leather which another precious heap of refuse had yielded at the Niya site in 1901.

There was a novelty, too, in the shape of a strip of white silk inscribed with Kharoshthi. It furnished the first tangible confirmation for that Chinese antiquarian tradition which knows of silk as one of the ancient writing materials preceding the invention of paper. Two small rectangular lids in wood, provided with a seal-socket and adjoining string-grooves (Fig. 119, 13, 14), exactly like the 'covering tablets' of official Kharoshthi documents, afforded special satisfaction to my archaeological conscience; for the Chinese writing they bore, evidently addresses, proved clearly that I had been right when years before I conjectured a Chinese origin for all the essential technical features of that ancient wooden stationery first brought to light at the Niya site.

But still more welcome, perhaps, on account of the new problem it raised, was a small strip of paper showing two lines in an 'unknown' writing I had never seen before. It manifestly ran from right to left, and several of the characters distantly recalled Aramaic. No decipherment could be hoped for from such a fragment. Yet the script, with its clearly Western look, forcibly drew my thoughts to people from ancient Sogdiana or even more distant Iranian lands who might have travelled and traded by this old high road to the country of the silk-weaving Seres. As I put the precious fragment carefully