

Entries on
outside
surface of
'wedges'.

On the Obv. of the covering-tablet, which bears the clay seal, and which soon proved to have served the purposes of a kind of envelope, there appear invariably brief entries in Kharoṣṭhī script, consisting of a short line to the right of the seal-socket and of a few characters to the right of the string-hole near where the wedge runs out in a point. These entries, having become effaced through exposure, do not appear clearly in the reproduction of N. i. 103 (Plate IC), though the original shows them; but in the reproductions of the wedge-shaped tablets N. xv. 24 (in the same plate), N. xv. 137 (Plate XCVIII), N. xv. 71 (Plate C) they are plainly visible. Their very position and form at once suggested that they were intended either as memoranda of the contents, or else to convey the name of the sender or addressee. The last supposition proved the right one, when subsequent examination showed that the three characters near the string-hole were to be read *datavo* 'to be given to', and that the words on the right of the seal-socket always contained a name with the appropriate case-ending. The Rev. of the under-tablet, otherwise ordinarily left blank, shows in all well-preserved tablets a single word written near the square end, which, by Professor Rapson's examination, has proved to contain the name of the person entrusted with the document. This last-named entry is seen on N. i. 9 (Plate C) and N. xv. 137 (Plate XCVIII). N. i. 122 (Plate XCVIII) is interesting as the only instance where the Rev. of an under-tablet displays this entry not written in ink but engraved into the wood, and in a transverse direction, instead of the usual one parallel to the longer side. The inscribed tablets not showing the wedge-shape which turned up in N. i., only some eleven in number, were too few and too varied to yield at the time any clue as to their character or arrangement. Hence it must suffice to mention among them N. i. 70 (see Plate CIII), which, though shaped like a wedge and provided with a string-hole was not a document of the regular type. The deep groove passing round the broad end was certainly meant for a fastening. The few characters (*datavo*) near the string-hole show that the tablet contained an address, and suggest its having been used as a label, perhaps attached to a bag. For another tablet of peculiar shape, see N. i. 56 in inventory.

Preservation
of inscribed
tablets.

Apart from the large number of inscribed tablets yielded by N. i., this first find-place of the site was remarkable also for the relatively good preservation of most of its epigraphic relics. Where double tablets had remained together and thus protected each other, the black ink of the Kharoṣṭhī lines written on the inner surfaces looked as fresh as if penned quite recently. On those tablets which, when thrown down by Ibrāhīm, had come to lie with their written surface fully exposed, the characters had often become bleached, evidently by the effect of sun and sand; while the ink had 'run' or become somewhat blurred through the moisture which the recent snowfall had brought. But the writing, even on these pieces, has scarcely ever become illegible. Curiously enough, some of the tablets which Ibrāhīm had left undisturbed below the sand had suffered a good deal more by warping, cracking, and similar damage to the wood. The cause in these cases was undoubtedly the position close to the floor which the tablets occupied, and which had made them liable to absorb what subsoil moisture the ground received after the abandonment of the site. That some had suffered even in ancient times becomes probable from the insect borings found in several (e. g. N. i. 12, 49, 60), and from the broken condition of others which Ibrāhīm had not disturbed (e. g. N. i. 100+109, 111, 101, 106).

Character of
Kharoṣṭhī
writing.

The good preservation of the great majority of that first day's finds made it easy to recognize that the tablets, though written by many different hands, showed throughout the characteristic peculiarities of that type of Kharoṣṭhī writing which is exhibited by inscriptions of the extreme North-West of India during the Kuṣana or Indo-Scythian rule. In spite of the chronological problems presented by the era used in those inscriptions, it is certain that the period of this rule