

under several feet of sand near the end of the passage adjoining N. xv. from the south (marked in plan, Plate XXXII).

The conditions peculiar to dustbin deposits are curiously reflected by various observations concerning the documents recovered from N. xv. In the first place I may note the relative frequency of broken but otherwise well-preserved pieces. I do not mean the instances, so numerous also in other ruins, where covering- and under-tablets originally forming one record have become separated, but cases where fragments of the same document were found scattered in different parts of the room, or where individual pieces of wood and leather, though otherwise in good condition, show marks of having been broken or torn⁴. It is safe to assume that the damage in almost all these cases was caused before the pieces and fragments had been swept out of living rooms of the house and thrown on to this rubbish-heap. The thin and narrow slips of wood which served for Chinese documents were, of course, far easier to 'tear up', i. e. to break when their contents had been disposed of, than the more substantial Kharoṣṭhī 'wedges', 'oblongs', rectangular tablets, &c. This at once explains why the great majority of the Chinese 'tablets' as seen in Plates CXII-CXIV were found broken, often into very small pieces⁵. In almost all these Chinese pieces the wood was found in good preservation, which makes it still more probable that the breakage had been caused purposely before the dustbin received them. Just like our 'waste-paper', these ancient records on wood, when no longer needed by their owners, must have often come handy for lighting fires with. We have evidence of this use in certain tablets from N. xv. which bear marks of having been partly burnt⁶. Damage by knife or chisel-cuts is seen on tablet N. xv. 334 (Plate XCV); and in one instance (N. xv. 199) we have marks of the scraping by which a wooden tablet already inscribed could be rendered fit again for use, but no fresh record has been added in this case. A more minute examination of the tablets from N. xv. may bring to light more than one piece which had actually served for a palimpsest.

Documents damaged before deposit on rubbish-heap.

The consolidated mass of rubbish and dust must be credited with having afforded excellent protection to the documents which had once become embedded in it. The good state of preservation shown by the great majority of the documents, whether on wood or leather, bears ample evidence to this. A brief analysis of the cases where tablets or leather documents have undergone deterioration during the long centuries since they were first thrown on to this rubbish-heap, proves that the risks to which they were there exposed were distinctly smaller than if they had been left behind on the floor of some office-room, as in N. i., N. iv., N. v., protected only by the easily shifted cover of drift-sand. The number of tablets, the wood of which has perished or become soft in the way characteristic of the effects of exposure to atmospheric influences or damp, as illustrated by so many pieces from the above find-places, is relatively very small⁷. It is also

Protection afforded to documents.

⁴ Kharoṣṭhī documents recovered in two or more fragments are N. xv. 10+80+190, 14+27, 23+150, 29. a.+b, 55+81, 76+181, 87+308, 154. a.+157, 301+302. It is probable that on further examination more of the fragmentary pieces will prove to fit each other. Broken tablets of recognizable original shape are 108, 116, 153, 175, 206, 318, 322, 340; fragments of tablets, the type of which can no longer be determined, are 80, 80. a., 142+147+148, 193, 354, 01.

⁵ Out of forty-nine inscribed Chinese 'tablets' (to use this term for uniformity's sake) only five, viz., N. xv. 93, 109, 197, 197. a., 314, were recovered complete, showing the full average length of 9 to 9½ in. Among the other broken

pieces small fragments, down to 1⅜ in. in length, are very numerous; see N. xv. 34, 59. b, 69, 72, 78, 82, &c. An inspection of the Chinese records on wood as reproduced in Plates CXII-CXIV will best illustrate this observation.

⁶ See N. xv. 20, 34, 90, 174. The Chinese tablets being thin and narrow would have made excellent 'spills' for lighting a pipe. N. xv. 34, slightly burnt at one end (see Plate CXII), may possibly have served such a purpose.

⁷ Tablets with soft or perished surface are N. xv. 6. a., 8, 19, 22, 23, 46, 57, 65, 82, 82. a., 132, 154+157, 205, 206, 335, 343, 03; similar also is the leather document, N. xv. 336.