

Bhūrja from Kashmīr, the nearest area which could furnish it, very troublesome and expensive. That Bhūrja was nevertheless known in Khotan is proved by the Dutreuil de Rhins MS., and by the tiny fragment I discovered on the plaster wall of the Endere temple cella<sup>25</sup>. Palm-leaves must have been still more difficult to obtain, though it is probable that MSS. written on this material were at times imported from India into Buddhist establishments<sup>26</sup>. Leather was used for writing purposes, as my discoveries in N. xv. have proved; but its preparation was certainly more troublesome than that of wood, and its cost, too, in all probability greater. Wood was thus indicated by nature as the common writing-material in the Khotan region, and probably throughout Eastern Turkeṣtān, just as the bamboo was in China, until the introduction of the far more convenient paper rendered its use obsolete.

Paper not used in Khotan about middle of third cent. A. D.

Why paper should not have come into use in Khotan territory even one and a half centuries after its invention in China is a question which cannot be definitely answered from our available materials. The fact itself must be considered as certain, for rich though the ruins explored by me at the Niya River Site were in rubbish remains of all kinds, not one of them yielded the smallest scrap of paper. This total absence of records on paper is all the more curious in view of the political connexion with China which did not cease, as our Chinese documents plainly prove, even after the close of the later Han dynasty. Nor can it be attributed to the possible want of the paper-mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), from the bark of which the modern paper of Khotan is exclusively manufactured, seeing that the alternative use of rags, hemp, and other substitutes was known in China from the very time of the first invention of paper (105 A. D.)<sup>27</sup>. Whatever the cause may have been, the continued use of wood during the latter half of the third century in a distant Khotan settlement cannot be a matter of surprise when it is considered that, as M. Chavannes has shown from incontestable evidence, writing on bamboo slips was still currently practised in China itself about 200 A. D.<sup>28</sup>

#### SECTION VI.—DECIPHERMENT OF ANCIENT DOCUMENTS, KHAROṢṬHĪ AND CHINESE

In the preceding sections I have endeavoured to record an accurate description of the localities and conditions in which my main discoveries of ancient documents at this site were made, and to set forth and justify those archaeological conclusions which the observations then made and the subsequent scrutiny of the documents in their outward appearance have led me to draw as regards their form, arrangement, and probable purpose. The historical importance of the records contained in them was in the course of my excavations ever vividly before my eyes; and in the case of the Kharoṣṭhī documents I had reason to welcome each fresh find as additional help towards the elucidation of both script and language. But from the first I recognized that the decipherment and elucidation of this wealth of materials would require much time and patient labour. The nature of my philological qualifications obliged me, at the time of discovery and during the rare moments of rest on my subsequent travels, to limit my attention to the Kharoṣṭhī records. When, after their safe transfer to the British Museum, Prof. Rapson,

Study of Kharoṣṭhī documents.

<sup>25</sup> See below, chap. XII, sec. ii.

<sup>26</sup> Evidence in this direction is furnished by the arrangement of the Brāhmī MSS. on paper from both Dandān-Uiliq and Kuchā, which clearly shows imitation of palm-leaves, in their Pōthī shape, string-holes, &c. Bhūrja MSS.

were either rolled, as shown by the Dutreuil de Rhins MS., or else arranged in 'forms' and bound after the fashion of our books, as is invariably the case with Kashmīr Sanskrit MSS.

<sup>27</sup> See Chavannes, *Les livres chinois*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 74 sq., also p. 58.