

Technical terms for designation of Kharoṣṭhī documents.

Not the least curious among the results so far secured by the work of decipherment is the proof that the use of the various types of ancient stationery represented was restricted to particular classes of documents for which we can still ascertain the official terminology. With unchanging regularity the double wedge-tablets are designated in their context by the term *kilamudra*. I have previously suggested its interpretation as a compound of *kila*, corresponding to Skr. *kīlaka* 'wedge', and *mudrā* 'seal'. That the application of a term meaning 'wedge [-tablet] and seal' would be appropriate in this case is clear; but I admit that, in regard to the explanation of the second portion of the term, the occasional variant *mumtra*, noticed by Prof. Rapson, deserves special attention²⁴. We have seen already that the term *anadilekha* (Skr. *ājñaptilekha*), 'letter of injunction' or 'rescript', is specially used for official orders recorded on leather. The rectangular double tablets are always referred to as *lihitaka* or 'letter'. Another technical term of this kind is *stovana*, but whether it was applied to an open communication written on one or the other type of oblong tablets, as its use in the draft *B* of N. xvi. 2 seems to suggest²⁵, remains at present doubtful. It is evident that the clerks of those ancient offices were quite as particular about bureaucratic distinctions of this kind as the 'Babu' of modern India, who would never make a mistake about supplying himself with 'octavo note' for his D. O.'s, foolscap for his 'fair docket', or slips for his 'office memos.'

Historical import of use of Prākṛit language.

The very nature of the contents, and the complete absence of similar records of ancient date in India itself, must render the full elucidation of the Kharoṣṭhī documents a slow task beset with exceptional difficulties. Not until the whole of these ample materials has been rendered accessible to Indologists by the textual publication to which Prof. Rapson, assisted by MM. Senart and Boyer, is now devoting his critical labours, will it be possible to form an approximately correct estimate of the multifarious aspects of ancient life and culture which they may bring back to light. But whatever revelations of detail may be in store for us, it is not likely that any of them will approach in historical interest one important fact which can now be clearly recognized. I mean the use of an Indian language throughout the mass of non-Chinese records, whether official or private. When we take into account the distinctly secular character of most of them, this evidence of the language must be considered a striking confirmation of the old local tradition, recorded by Hsüan-tsang as well as in the Tibetan 'Annals of Li-yul', and already discussed in chapter VII, according to which the territory of Khotan received a large portion of its early population by immigration from the region of Takṣaśilā or Taxila. It must certainly lead us to believe in some historical fact underlying this tradition, if in an outlying settlement of ancient Khotan we find a mass of multifarious records, accumulated by chance, and all closely connected with indigenous administration and ordinary life, written in a language which has its nearest extant congener in that of the inscriptions and coins from the extreme North-West of India during the centuries immediately before and after the commencement of the Christian era.

Kharoṣṭhī script in Taxila region.

It is an equally significant fact that the Kharoṣṭhī script which our documents present in a form very closely allied to that found in the inscriptions of the Kuṣana period²⁶, was

²⁴ See his remarks in *Specimens*, p. 13; also M. Boyer's note, *J. asiat.*, 1905, Mai-Juin, p. 466. The term, if interpreted as I proposed, would appear a somewhat barbarous compound; but some grammatical latitude might well be allowed to the old Khotan clerks, who are likely to have coined it, perhaps, as a rendering of some foreign (Chinese?) term.

²⁵ See *Specimens*, p. 11. The bearer of the missive is spoken of as 'letter-reader' (*lekhavacitu*).

²⁶ For the Kharoṣṭhī writing of the documents and its relations to the Indian forms of the script see Prof. Rapson's illuminating notes, 'On the alphabet of the Kharoṣṭhī documents,' in *Actes du XIV^e Congrès des Orientalistes*, i. pp. 210 sqq.