

parts of the room brought to light five more tablets, N. xxiv. viii. 65-9. These emerged from the top of the mud flooring, having been thrown into corners and below the walls, probably some time before the abandonment. Their thickly encrusted condition was a result of contact with plastered surfaces.

The scraping of the floor was still proceeding when a strange discovery rewarded honest Rustam, whom, as the most experienced and reliable of my old diggers of 1901, I was employing on this search. Already during the first clearing I had noticed a large lump of clay or plaster, looking like a fragment from a broken wall, lying close to the north wall of the room where the tablets had turned up in packets. At the time I thought little of its presence there, but had ordered it to be left undisturbed. Now when Rustam extracted between it and the wall the well-preserved wedge covering-tablet, N. xxiv. viii. 70, I could not prevent its removal. As soon as this had been effected, I saw him eagerly burrow with his hands into the floor thus laid bare, and, before I could put any question, triumphantly draw forth, from a hole dug less than six inches deep, the complete rectangular tablet N. xxiv. viii. 71, with its clay seal intact and the envelope still secured by the original string fastening. Rustam's fingers now worked with the sudden energy of the successful 'treasure-seeker' at enlarging the hole, and soon I could see that the space towards the wall and below the foundation beam of the latter was filled with closely packed layers of similar wooden documents. The photograph, Fig. 61, shows the spot of the deposit, a little to the right of the measuring-rod, just as it looked before the work of extraction was completed next morning.

Discovery of  
cache of  
Kharoṣṭhī  
documents.

There could be no doubt that we had come upon a small hidden archive, and I greeted this novel experience with keen satisfaction. Apart from the interest of the documents themselves and their remarkable state of preservation, the very conditions of their discovery were bound to afford valuable indications. The ground in front had first to be opened out to permit safe and orderly removal of the tablets. This was then commenced from the top layer and from west to east, the tablets being numbered accordingly. As one large rectangular double tablet after another was lifted out and cleared of the adhering dust layer, I noted with special satisfaction that with a few exceptions they all retained their string fastenings unopened and sealed down on the envelope in the original fashion. But darkness came on long before I could extract the whole of the records which lay exposed below the wall, and I had to be content with clearing that evening the tablets N. xxiv. viii. 71-86 only. In my Personal Narrative I have described the safeguards I adopted to preclude any possible interference with the remaining contents of the deposit during the night, and in the course of the following morning, October 25, I was able to remove these tablets too, N. xxiv. viii. 87-96, in perfect safety.

Clearing of  
hidden  
archive.

It was easy for me to realize the great value of the fresh materials which such a haul of perfectly preserved documents would furnish for the study of the language and the elucidation of the contents in these difficult Kharoṣṭhī records. But I also knew that years would pass before these materials could be fully utilized by philological research. I was, therefore, all the more gratified to find on the spot that they afforded manifest confirmation of a conjectural explanation I had arrived at in the case of a few previous finds of this kind. Of none of the rectangular tablets discovered on my previous journey were translations available at the time when I discussed the outer features, etc., of this important class of documents in my *Ancient Khotan*.<sup>4</sup> But the fact that no less than three of the complete rectangular tablets from N. xv were found unopened, along with some other considerations, led me then to suppose that these were deeds of agreement and the like which had to be kept under their original fastening in order that in case of need

Complete  
rectangular  
tablets found  
unopened.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 353 sq.