Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Social Sciences

MHI-10
Urbanisation in India

Block

3

EARLY HISTORIC CITIES

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July, 2016

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ISBN :

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Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by Director, School of Social Sciences.

Lasertypesetted at Graphic Printers, 204, Pankaj Tower, Mayur Vihar, Phase-I, Delhi-110091.

Printed at :

BLOCK 3 EARLY HISTORIC CITIES

It should be clear from the Units in Block 2 that the Bronze Age urbanity of the Harappan civilisation which emerged and spread largely within the greater Indus system declined toward the beginning of the second millennium BCE[1]. There were vast areas of the Indian subcontinent where varieties of other cultures, which were not urban, prevailed. There were of course remote pockets where Harappan cultural elements are surprisingly present; they were mostly sites for resource-procurement and did not really represent Harappan geography.

A new phase of urbanism began almost after thirteen-fourteen hundred years. There, of course, were different kinds of village settlements or pastoral camps in almost all parts of the subcontinent, but it was only from 6th-5th century BCE that one starts noticing the presence of urban features of a large number of sites.

There are very major differences between the Bronze Age urbanism and the new urbanism which emerged in the Iron Age. The difference was not simply technical. For one thing, the geographical focus of the new urbanisation, which is called second urbanisation to distinguish it from the earlier one, was different, with Ganges basin – upper, middle and lower – as the major region where the early urban centers were located. However, it must be remembered that cites like Taxila (near Islamabad in Pakistan) and Charsada (near Peshawar) were a part of this urban horizon, as was Ujjayini in western Malwa.

Secondly, this new phase of urbanism geographically spread in gradual stages. Among the stages of its expansion, third-second centuries BCE may be considered to be of major importance. Needless to say, the urban centers in different regions were not identical. The individual features of the urban centres depended on their locations and the varieties of activities that took place in them. Within the overall context of agricultural economy and agrarian settlements, the growing commercial activities and networks led to the growth of movement towards the cities and a variety of urban centres. The major urban centers were also centres of political authority of the period which explains the presence of fortification within the city, although not of the form of Harappan citadels. The new cultural elements of this phase of urbanisation were the appearance of scripts (deciphered) for writing, varieties of coins, very inadequate evidence of urban planning, use of burnt bricks on a substantial scale, etc.

Written texts give us interesting insights into the world of cities and towns which would otherwise be not known from archaeology alone. For example, they tell us about different kinds of space within which cities and towns should be viewed as one, though most important, type of settlement: there were forests, deep jungles, village settlements and pastoral settlements constituting *janapadas*. Cities demonstrate links between different *janapadas*; apart from being centres of political authority, they were sites where peoples from different directions converged, brought their different products and cultures and thus made them vastly different and more entertaining than villages.

Both archaeology and texts give us interesting insights into the world of cities and towns. For example, they tell us about different kinds of spaces, both within and outside urban centres: sacred spaces, forests, villages and pastoral camps. Many urban centres emerged either as seats of political powers or as nodes of exchange, bringing together diverse groups of people. Thus, cities were socially and culturally heterogeneous in character.

[1] BCE = Before Common Era; CE = Common Era.

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UNIT 10 ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES IN NORTH INDIA: EMERGENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS*

Structure

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Surveys and Excavations of Early Historic Urban Centres

10.3 Emergence of Early Historic Urban Centres

10.4 Characteristics of Early Historic Urban Centres

- 10.4.1 Sizes
- 10.4.2 Fortification
- 10.4.3 Spaces outside Early Historic Urban Centres
- 10.4.4 Layouts
- 10.4.5 Public and Religious Buildings
- 10.4.6 Houses
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10.1 INTRODUCTION

While the earliest urban centres emerged in the third millennium BCE in the northwestern parts of the subcontinent, most of these cities and towns were abandoned around 1900 BCE. After a gap of nearly 1400 years, urban centres re-emerged not just in the northwest but also in the Gangetic valley in north India around 500 BCE. The term 'Early Historic' refers to a chronological period spanning in north India from approximately 500 BCE till about 500 CE. In contrast to the northwest, numerous Early Historic urban centres emerged in north India and many of these have been excavated. Despite the large number of excavations, we know far less about the Early Historic urban centres as compared to what we know of the Harappan cities. This lacuna is largely related to the kind of excavations that have been carried at most of these Early Historic sites. What is even more noteworthy is that even though nearly forty years ago, Amalananda Ghosh in the preface of his book, *The City in Early Historical India*, had written about the limited archaeological evidence on the Early Historic cities and towns, the situation is not any better even today.

> The source material is not as abundant as one would have liked it to be. This stands in the way of a full evaluation of the early historical cities in all their material and cultural aspects. While the description of cities in literature follows a stereotype, the archaeological evidence is woefully insufficient and only emphasizes the need of laying bare the remains of a few early cities on an extensive scale. Only then shall we be able to understand them at least to the extent to which we understand the Indus cities (Ghosh, 1973: Preface).

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Why is it that hardly any sustained horizontal excavations have been undertaken at an Early Historic city/town to better understand urbanism, morphology and urban processes during this period? This is an issue which will be taken up for discussion later in this Unit. Given the paucity of archaeological evidence, at best a somewhat sketchy description of the Early Historic urban centres in the northwest and north India can be provided.

10.2 SURVEYS AND EXCAVATIONS OF EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES

In this Section we will review the archaeological data which is available for the analysis of urban centres in the Early Historic period in north and northwest India. A strategy that has been employed by archaeologists to identify possible urban centres based on surveys is known as settlement pattern studies. This involves undertaking a survey of archaeological sites in a defined geographical region and noting their location and size. Architectural features if any are mapped, and collections are made of pottery and other artefacts from the surface. Based on the sizes of sites in different chronological periods, site size hierarchies are worked out for different periods. The assumption is that if there is a multi-tiered hierarchy of sizes with a considerable difference between the smaller and larger sites, then perhaps the latter could be identified as urban centres.

One such survey (Erdosy, 1988) was carried out to better understand the emergence and development of urbanisation in the middle Ganga valley between approximately 1000 BCE and 300 CE. Erdosy undertook his study in the doab tehsils of Chail, Manjhapur and Sirathu in Allahabad district, Uttar Pradesh. The area selected for survey was nearly 2000 square kilometres, making it impossible to carry out a full coverage strategy. Erdosy therefore decided to use the conventional village to village survey method. In the next stage several large villages were selected for a more intensive survey or fieldwalking within a radius of 10 to 12 kilometres around them.

Based largely on pottery, four periods were identified: Period I (1000-600 BCE), Period II (600-350 BCE), Period III (350-100 BCE) and Period IV (100 BCE-300 CE). Erdosy reported that during his survey he identified 16 sites in Period I, 21 sites in Period II, 45 sites in Period III, and 56 sites in Period IV (see **Table I**).

Table I: Number of Sites in Different Periods

Chronology	Period I 1000-600 BCE	Period II 600-350 BCE	Period III 350-100 BCE	Period IV 100 BCE-300 CE
Number of Sites	16	21	45	56

Further he developed a four tier hierarchy of sites based on sizes, namely, 0-5.99 hectares (Category A), 6-9.99 hectares (Category B), 10-49.99 hectares (Category C), and above 50 hectares (Category D). He found that in Period I, 15 sites belonged to Category A, while 1 site was in Category C; in Period II, 17 sites belonged to Category A, 2 sites to Category B, and 1 site each in Categories C and D; in Period III, 41 sites belonged to Category A, 2 sites to Category B, and 1 site each to Categories C and D; and in Period IV, 53 sites belonged to Category A, and 1 site each in Categories B, C and D (see **Table II**). However one must keep in mind that in estimating sizes, especially of sites that were occupied in different periods, it becomes difficult at times to assess the sizes during the earlier periods of occupation. Similarly the ceramics and

artefacts of earlier periods may not always be visible on the surface and therefore sites of earlier periods may be numerically under represented.

Table II: Site Size Categories in Different Periods

Site Size Categories	Period I 1000-600 BCE	Period II 600-350 BCE	Period III 350-100 BCE	Period IV 100 BCE-300CE
Category A 0-5.99 hectares	15	17	41	63
Category B 6-9.99 hectares	-	2	2	1
Category C 10-49.99 hectares	1	1	1	1
Category D above 50 hectares	-	1	1	1
Total	16	21	45	56

Erdosy noted that the site of Kausambi, was 12 hectares in Period I, 50 hectares in Period II, 200 hectares in Period III, and 226 hectares in Period IV. He also mentioned that the difference in size between Kausambi and other sites became marked from Period II onwards. In Period II the next largest site after Kausambi was 12 hectares, and in Periods III and IV it was 22 hectares each.

While surveys do have the potential to identify urban centres and also provide some clues about the reasons for their locations, ultimately it is only through excavations that one can obtain much more detailed information about cities and towns. In the case of Early Historic cities and towns of northwest and north India, a very large number have been excavated in the last 100 years. This list includes Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh in the Taxila valley, and Charsadda, near Peshawar in the northwest; Bairat, Sonkh, Mathura, Hastinapura, Ahicchatra, Atranjikhera, Indor Khera, Kanauj, Ayodhya, Kausambi, Sringverpur, Sravasti, Tilaurakot, Ganwaria, Kasia, Rajghat, Buxar, Prahladpur, Vaisali, Rajgir, Pataliputra, and Campa in the north; Bangarh, Mahasthangarh and Chandraketugarh in the east (see **Map 10.1**). Of these the most informative are the excavations carried out at Bhita near Allahabad (Marshall, 1915), Sirkap in the Taxila valley in Pakistan (Marshall, 1951), Sonkh near Mathura (Härtel, 1993) and Mahasthangarh in Bangladesh (Alam and Salles, 2001).

So while numerous Early Historic cities and towns have been excavated, they do not add much to our understanding of them. This is linked to the nature of the archaeological practices that persist in our country even today. Many of these are related to intuitive research procedures, outdated methodologies in field and interpretation, poorly published reports, inadequate data, and lack of concern with theoretical questions. The conventional village to village survey persists, despite the shift to systematic survey methods in most parts of the world. In the former method, it is only the areas around the villages that are randomly surveyed, while the latter involves an intensive survey of a defined area with detailed recordings of all architectural features and artefacts. The primary aim of most excavations still seems to be the determination of broad cultural sequences involving vertical excavations. In cases where horizontal excavations are

carried out, the emphasis has largely been on uncovering architectural features and recording artefacts of either aesthetic value or those that are useful as chronological indicators. What gets missed in these large-scale excavations is the detailed information about the exact provenance of artefacts that is essential for any meaningful analysis. In contrast in most recent excavations outside India we find a much slower, more rigorous recovery and documentation of the entire archaeological assemblage within particular architectural units. So in India what is urgently required is that instead of excavating more and more sites, the archaeologists should now focus on sustained and intensive excavations of a few promising Early Historic cities and towns.

Map 10.1: Early Historic Urban Centres [After Erdosy 1987: Figure I, Allchin, 1989: Figure I, Menon, et al, 2008: Figure 1].

10.3 EMERGENCE OF EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES

There has been a considerable debate concerning the factors responsible for the emergence of cities and towns in north India around 500 BCE. Among the most cited reasons are iron technology, social changes, emergence of artisans, traders and craft guilds, internal and long distance trade facilitated by the opening of trade routes in the northwest, political developments, and the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. The most controversial has been the role of iron tools in the clearance of forests and the use of iron ploughs for cultivation, particularly in the middle Ganga valley. It was Ram Sharan Sharma (2006), perhaps taking his cue initially from Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi (2006), who made a causal link between plough agriculture, an increase in settlements, surplus production and the beginning of towns and cities. He also argued that iron tools facilitated transport and other aspects of trade as well as crafts. The traders and artisans who were the primary residents of these newly emerging urban centres were also drawn to the new religions, Buddhism and Jainism, which arose around the same time.

Not everyone, however, agrees about the seminal role of iron technology. In particular it is the archaeologists who have expressed their reservation about the importance of

iron tools. For example, Niharranjan Ray (2006) based on his quantitative analysis of the iron tools from several archaeological sites, pointed out that these were not numerically adequate for producing the necessary surplus. He added that at the time the reliance was still on the hoe and the wooden plough, however ineffective these may have been. Further, as the archaeological evidence showed a far greater number of weapons, he speculated about their possible role in the formation of states. Dilip K. Chakrabarti (2006) too played down the role of iron as a contributing factor to the creation of the agricultural base, which he felt was in existence in the preceding neolithic-chalcolithic periods. Nor did the beginning of the use of iron from about 1000 BCE or even slightly earlier usher in any dramatic change. He in fact attributed political power to be the causative factor. Another archaeologist, Shereen Ratnagar (2006), has also critiqued the causal link that has been made between the expansion in cultivation and the use of iron plough in Magadha in the mid first millennium BCE. She raises several very important questions, including the efficacy of iron ploughs as against the more commonly used wooden plough, and an over emphasis on rice cultivation as a critical factor in the increased agricultural production. However it must be added that she sees the significance of iron elsewhere, for instance, the role it played in the construction of stone buildings, cart axles and wheel spokes, ship anchors and glass production. Further, based on a survey of settlements, dated between 1500 BCE and 300 CE in Kanpur district, Makkhan Lal (2006) has shown that there was no relationship between the extensive use of iron tools and large scale forest clearance.

Thus we find that for almost fifty years, roughly from the middle till the end of the last century, the focus of many of the historians and archaeologists has remained limited to the general factors responsible for ushering in urbanisation in the mid first millennium BCE. This issue has perhaps reached a stalemate and if at all it has to move forward then we need to get into the specificities of each urban centre. Further unless a few of these cities and towns are systematically surveyed and excavated afresh on a sustained basis with recent methods of recovery and documentation, we will not be able to understand their emergence any better.

10.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES

In this Section we will examine some of the characteristic features of Early Historic urban centres. These include sizes, fortification, spaces immediately outside the urban centres, layouts, public and religious buildings, houses and craft production.

10.4.1 Sizes

The scanty data that we have about the Early Historic cities and towns is apparent from the lack of knowledge of even basic information such as their sizes. While estimates are available for the fortified area of some of the urban centres, the total size of most of them remains unknown. For instance, the fortified areas are as follows: Pataliputra (1200 hectares), Mathura (295 hectares), Taxila (Bhir mound is 70 hectares, Sirkap is 78 hectares, and Sirsukh is 137 hectares), Kausambi (200 hectares), Rajgir (200 hectares in Phase I and 100 hectares in Phase II), Ahicchatra (180 hectares), Sravasti (160 hectares), Rajghat (40 hectares), Atranjikhera (64 hectares), Tilaurakot (20 hectares), Bhita (14 hectares) (Erdosy, 1987: 2), and Indor Khera (12 hectares) (Menon, et al, 2008). Some cities and towns were either not fortified or we have no information such as Sringaverpur (40 hectares), and Jhusi (30 hectares). Kausambi and Bhita had settlements outside the fortified areas too. In the case of Kausambi the unfortified area was 25 hectares and for Bhita it was 5 hectares. The site of Rajghat

may have been a citadel area whereas the more extensive occupation lay outside at Sarai Mohana on the opposite bank of the Varuna (Erdosy, 1987). Thus we find a large variation in site sizes. Although some archaeologists have tried to work out a typology of urban centres based on site sizes (Allchin, 1989), such an exercise remains problematic and neither is it indicative of the actual activities that were being carried out there in the past.

It would have been interesting to compare urban centres that are closer in size as well with those that are much smaller or larger. However we do need to keep in mind that many of these urban centres may not have been contemporary to each other. So along with sizes we also need better data on the chronology of these urban centres, including dates for the different phases. Moreover questions regarding the various functions of these differently sized urban centres can only be addressed if we have better archaeological data.

10.4.2 Fortifications

Many of the Early Historic urban centres were fortified settlements, although at times habitation areas extended outside the walled area as at Kausambi and Bhita. Many of these fortifications were truly monumental in nature. For instance, at Kausambi, Rajgir, Ahicchatra, Mathura, and Atranjikhera, the walls were nearly 40 metres across the base, the height was at least 15 metres, and the length was over 6 kilometres (Erdosy, 1995: 111). Their ramparts at times had revetments of baked bricks (Kausambi) (see Figure 10.1) or alternately wooden planks were used for internal support (Pataliputra) (see Figure 10.2). There is also an instance of parapet walls of stone (Rajgir) (see Figure 10.3) being built on top of the ramparts. It has been suggested that these city ramparts may have served multiple functions, as protection from floods and invading armies or even a symbolic one where the city boundaries were clearly demarcated from the countryside (Erdosy, 1987). There could have been other functions too of these ramparts with several gateways. Could one of these functions have been to control or regulate movement of people both into them as well going out? Perhaps certain sections of the population were also kept out, an aspect which will be discussed in greater detail in the next Section.

10.4.3 Spaces outside Early Historic Urban Centres

Cities and towns in the Early Historic period may have consisted of two types of spaces: 'inside' and 'outside'. While the 'inside'spaces comprised the habitation areas within the fortifications, the 'outside' spaces included the peripheral zones beyond the fortifications. Akira Shimada (2009) has recently suggested new ways of conceptualizing some of these 'outside' spaces where he finds an overlap between Buddhist monasteries and other cultic objects, urn and 'megalithic' burials and memorial pillars at several sites in the Deccan like Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Sannathi. That the Buddhist monks not only preferred to live in or close to burial sites, but may have also participated in the death rites of the lay followers is a possibility that cannot be precluded. Shimada has made the point that while texts visualise monastic spaces as exclusively religious, archaeological evidence suggests otherwise. 'While monasteries were located on the fringe of the city or town, this peripheral area constituted a kind of space which allowed the accommodation of wider social groups, such as settlements for heretic and outcaste people' (Shimada, 2009: 233). In fact it is time that archaeologists excavating Early Historic urban centres shifted their attention to these 'outside' spaces.

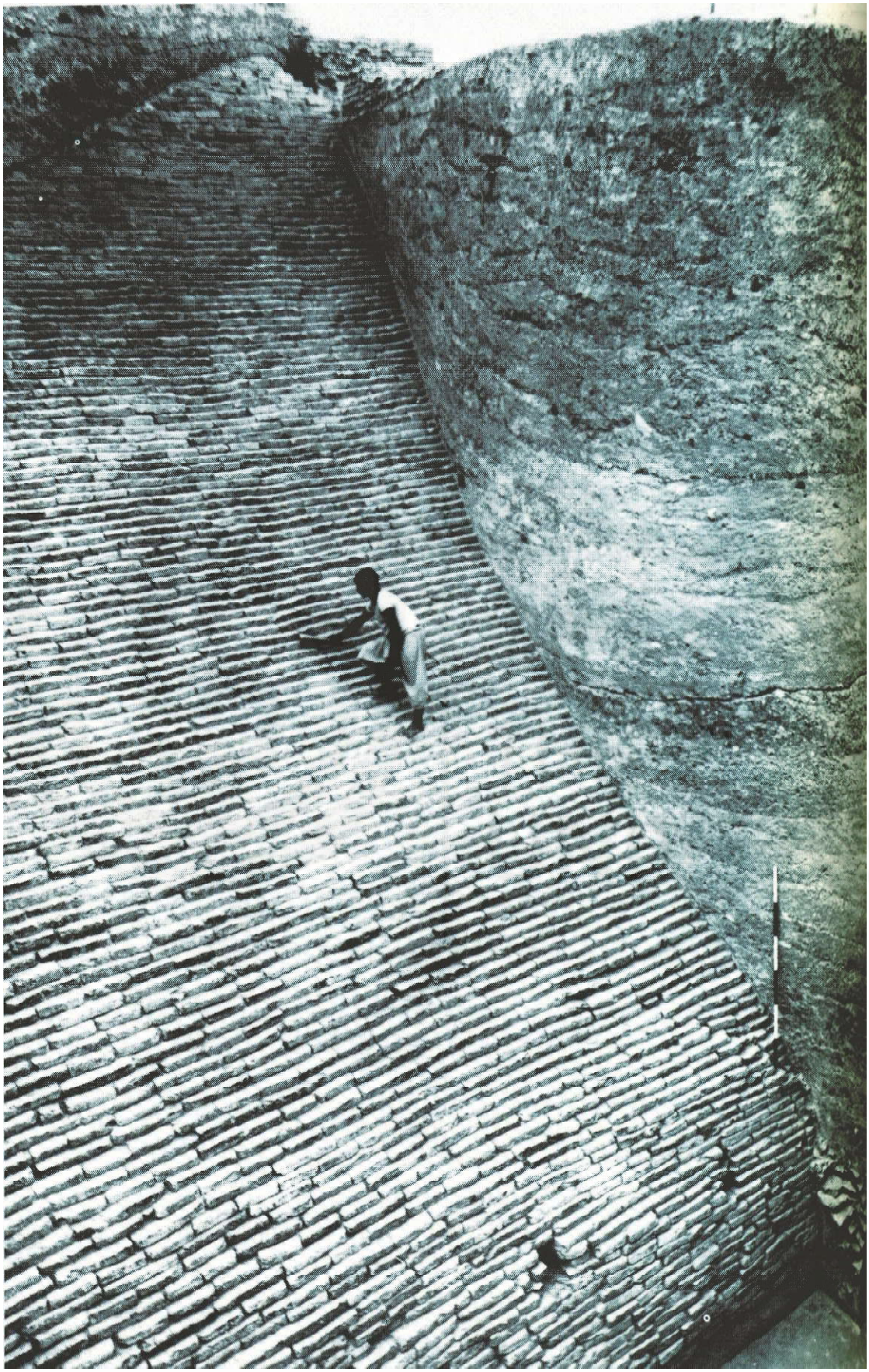

Figure 10.1: Brick Rampart at Kausambi [After Sharma, 1960: Plate XIII]

Figure 10.2: Wooden Rampart at Pataliputra [After Allchin, 1995: 203 (Wheeler Archive, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge)]

Figure 10.3: Stone Walls at Rajgir [Photograph by Supriya Varma]

Such an endeavour has been made at Indor Khera, located in the upper Ganga plains, where several mounds outside the main settlement have been excavated. Among these was a small mound about 200 metres north of it where several non-domestic structures in several structural phases dated between 200 BCE and 500 CE were excavated during the season 2009-10 (*Indian Archaeology-A Review, 2009-10,* hereafter *IAR*). It may be pertinent to mention that in the upper levels a square shrine was exposed, which on plan is very similar to Temple 2 of the Gupta period at Bhitari in the middle Ganga plain. There is also a copper plate inscription, dated to the reign of Skanda Gupta, which was found in the probing made by Archibald Campbell Carlleyle (1879) at Indor Khera between 1874 and 1876. The inscription mentions a grant to the temple of Savitâ near Mardasvâna adjoining Indrapura and a guild of oilmen from Indrapura are ordered to maintain this grant. What is interesting is that there is no memory of there ever being a temple or this particular mound being a ritual space. In fact not only

has the mound been deliberately destroyed by the local inhabitants even in the recent past, they were unwilling to accept that there could ever have been a temple there as for them it is only an image, however fragmented it may be, which denotes sacredness. Excavations on another mound, nearly 600 metres northeast of Indor Khera also revealed the plinth of possibly a temple of the early medieval period (*IAR*, *2009-10*) and in fact this is considered as ritual space both in memory and current practice.

At Sonkh, nearly 400 metres north of the citadel area was excavated an apsidal sanctuary. The first phase was dated to the beginning of the first centuries BCE and in the second phase, dated to first-second centuries CE, another temple was built partially on the walls of the earlier structure. According to Härtel (1993) the second temple was that of a Naga cult based on the finds of certain architectural pieces, like the lower lintel of the southern gate depicting a Naga court scene or a pillar fragment with a Nagaraja under a seven-headed cobra-hood in the medallion. Further, immediately to the north of this temple was found a monastery like building with rows of cells on three sides of a courtyard (see **Figure 10.4**). There are also the examples of stupa-monastery complexes at Piprahwa (see **Figure 10.5**) and Salagarh near Ganwaria located in the middle Ganga plains. (Srivastava, 1996)

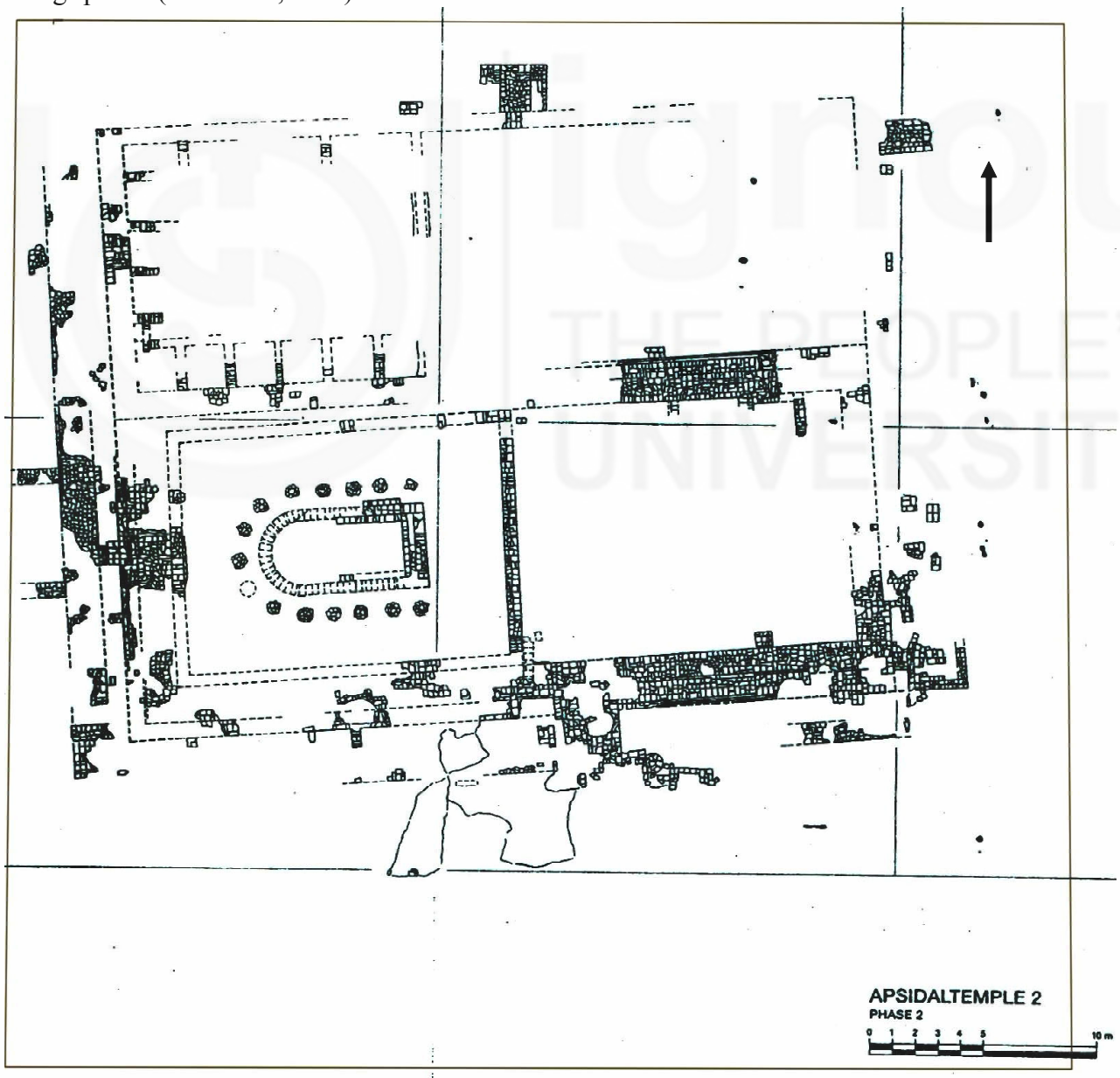

Figure 10.4: A Temple-Monastery Complex Outside the Town of Sonkh [After Härtel, 1993:417]

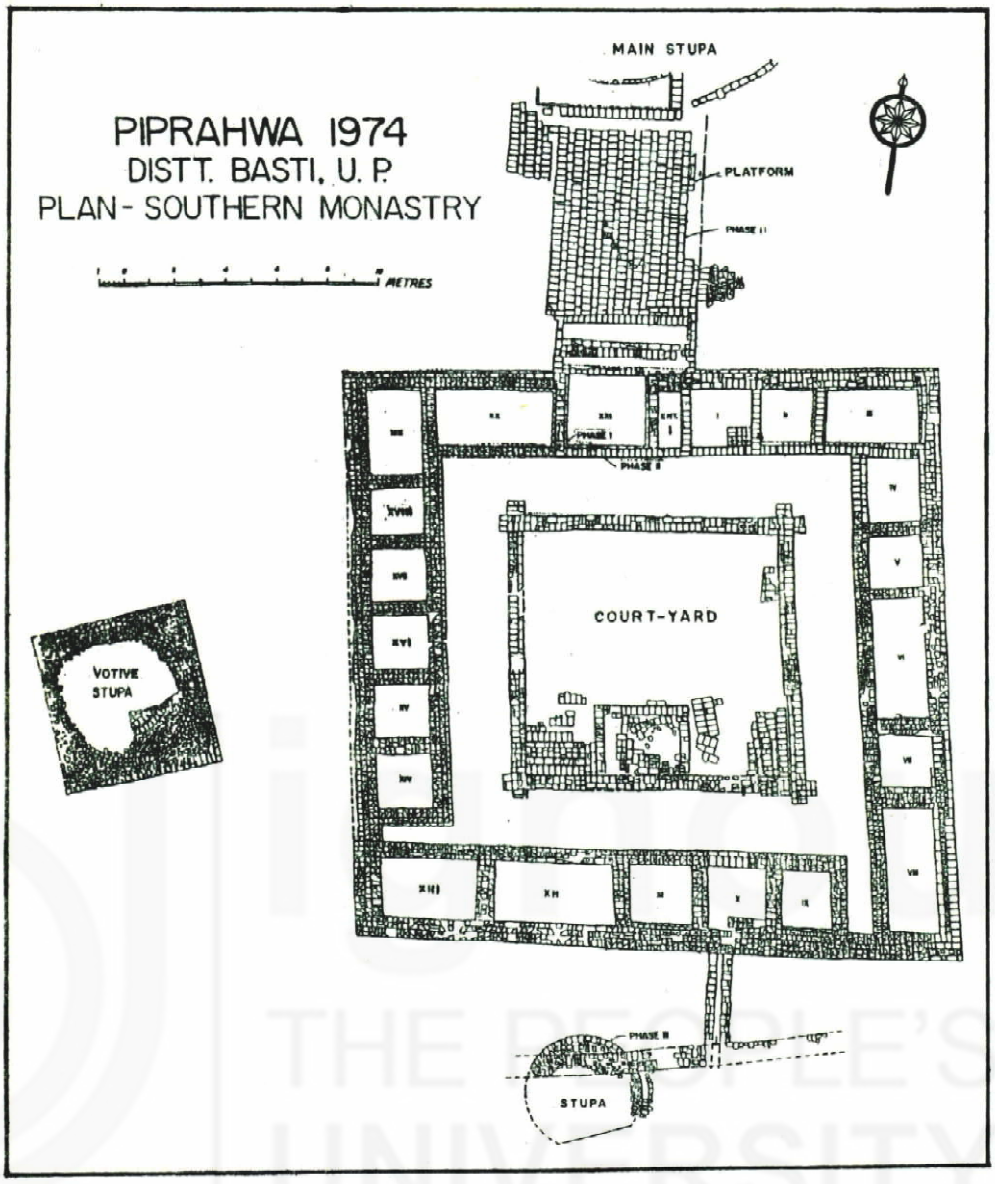

Figure 10.5: A Stupa-Monastery Complex at Piprahwa [After Srivastava, 1996: 42]

Some other examples would be the Dharamrajika stupa, contemporary to the Bhir mound but located at some distance from it, in the Taxila valley in the northwest. Similarly Buddhist monasteries and stupas at Mohra Moradu, Pippala and Julian were located within close vicinity of Sirsukh, also in the Taxila valley (Marshall, 1951). These will be discussed in greater detail in Unit 14.

10.4.4 Layouts

Apart from fortification, another feature of the Early Historic cities was an element of planning, particularly at Sirkap in the Taxila valley (Marshall, 1951), and Shaikhan Dheri at Charsadda (Coningham and Ali, 2007) in second-first centuries BCE. However it needs to be noted that initially urban centres emerged organically out of the existing rural settlements and with not much evidence for planning as at Bhir mound in the Taxila valley which is dated to the fifth century BCE. It is only when the new city of Sirkap was built by the Bactrian Greeks in the second-first centuries BCE that we encounter a grid plan settlement. As Marshall (1951: 4) describes the

> ...city was laid out on the typically Greek chess-board pattern, with streets cutting one another at right angles and regularly aligned blocks of buildings. Notwithstanding that the city was several times destroyed and rebuilt and that many transformations were made

in individual buildings, this Greek lay-out was on the whole well preserved down to the latest days of the city's occupation.

Similarly, at Charsadda the earlier city, Bala Hissar, was unplanned and only when the new settlement came up at Shaikhan Dheri, do we see evidence for the grid plan (Coningham and Ali, 2007). At Sonkh (Härtel, 1993) and Bhita (Marshall, 1915) too, from the second century BCE, elements of planning, with broad parallel roads with easy access to an individual block of buildings, are visible (see **Figure 10.6**).

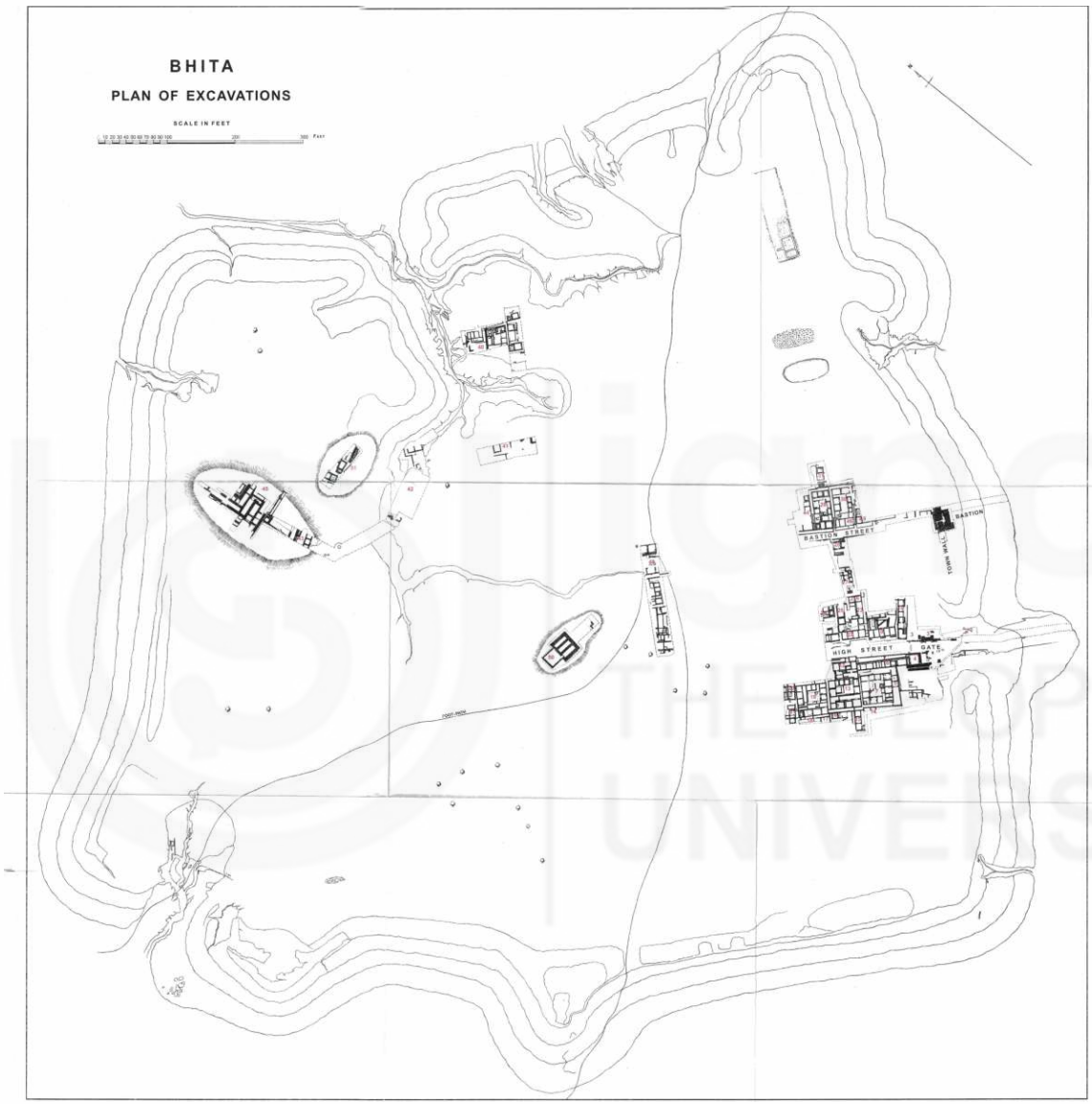

Figure 10.6: Streets and Houses at Bhita [After Marshall, 1915: Plate XII]

There are several implications of planning and it is important to understand all of them. One is that it is indicative of political authority playing a major role in the setting up of cities. The advantage of this grid plan is that it enables the rapid construction of a new settlement as well as subsequent additions to be made with ease and without disrupting the symmetry of the city layout as urban population increases. Another aspect of planning is the division of cities into different blocks that are separated by streets wide enough for vehicular traffic. The houses in these blocks are separated from each other by narrow lanes, and many of these could be accessed only by walking through them.

Large scale baked brick construction, particularly of domestic houses, began from the third century BCE at Rajghat (Narain and Roy, 1976) and Kausambi (Sharma, 1969)

and from the second century BCE at Sonkh (Härtel, 1993), Indor Khera (Varma and Menon, 2015) and Bhita (Marshall, 1915). This will be discussed in more detail in a later section. There is also some evidence for public brick and terracotta drains, masonry wells and tanks that suggest the presence of a civic authority. A few houses as well as streets and lanes were provided with burnt bricks and terracotta drains for the disposal of excess rain water at Rajghat, Kausambi, Hastinapur, and Mathura (Roy, 1986: 104-105). At Rajghat (Narain and Roy, 1976), a ring well enclosed by a brick pavement was located between two houses. Similarly public wells have been reported from Sonkh (Härtel, 1993) as well, for instance, a square public well of burnt bricks built on a platform (4×4 metres) at a street corner between two blocks. A brick complex comprising of three tanks with a silting chamber, connecting channels as well as an inlet and outlet channels, has been reported from Sringaverapura (Lal, 1993). The source of water is considered to be the Ganges river from which overflowing water would enter the tank via the inlet channel. The outlet channels also led to the river from the opposite direction. Clearly this tank complex was meant to provide water for the entire or major parts of the settlement.

10.4.5 Public and Religious Buildings

Several public and religious buildings have been reported from within the Early Historic cities and towns. The most well-known is a large rectangular pillared hall that was excavated at Kumrahar (Pataliputra) by David Brainerd Spooner in 1912-13. This has been associated with the Mauryan period but it was short lived as it was destroyed by fire in the second century BCE. During the excavation, a thick layer of burnt material, particularly wood ash was found. The excavators, based on this evidence have conjectured that the pillared hall may have had a massive superstructure or roof of timber. Eighty monolithic stone pillars were dug into foundation pits, ranging from 1.52 metres and 1.83 metres in depth. Over the foundation a raised plinth (nearly 43 metres × 33.5 metres) was built. A canal, nearly 12.6 metres wide and 3 metres deep, has also been reported to the south east of the hall (Spooner, 1916; Altekar and Mishra, 1959; Allchin, 1995: 237-38). So far there is little clarity about the function of this pillared hall. Due to the limited scale of excavation it is not known whether it was an isolated building or whether it was part of a palace complex. Govardhan Raj Sharma while excavating at Kausambi (*IAR*, *1960-61*; *IAR*, *1961-62*; *IAR*, *62-63*; *IAR*, *1963-64*) identified a 'palace-complex', which he claimed belonged to king Udayana, a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. However, such a claim was later refuted by Braj Basi Lal (1984-85) who argued that the 'palace' dated to the sixteenth century CE and not the sixth century BCE. Thus so far the only palace complex that has been identified at any Early Historic city is the one at Sirkap, which will be discussed in Unit 14.

Unlike the meagre evidence about public buildings or palaces, there is much more data on religious buildings that existed within cities such as at Sonkh, Kausambi, Ganwaria or Sirkap. At Sonkh (Härtel, 1993) a temple was excavated dating to the first three centuries of the Common Era. It however underwent frequent reconstructions and enlargements over nine structural phases. To begin with, in Phase 1 there existed a square building, to which an apse was added in Phase 2. Between Phases 5 and 8, the temple building had been constantly enlarged. Finally in Phase 9, this building had been converted once again to a square shrine that comprised of a raised platform, which could be accessed by two steps each from the north-eastern and south-eastern corners. At Kausambi (*IAR*, *1953-54*; *IAR*, *1954-55*; *IAR*, *1955-56*; *IAR*, *1956-57*) the Ghositarama monastery complex was located inside the fortified city. Similarly at Ganwaria, at least four square shrines and several monasteries have been excavated from within the city (Srivastava, 1996) (see **Figure 10.7**). The religious buildings found inside the city at Sirkap will be discussed in Unit 14.

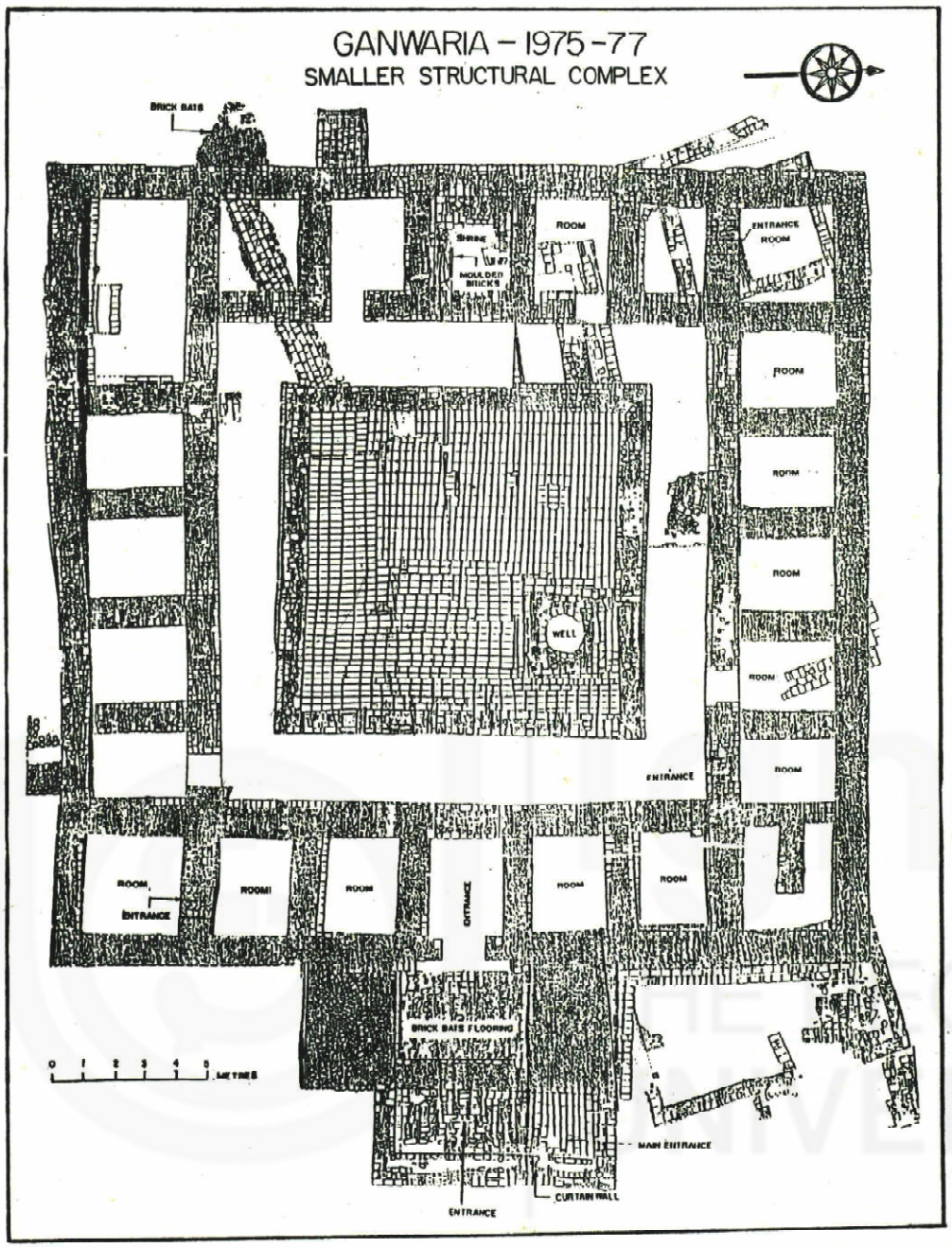

Figure 10.7: A Monastery Inside the Town of Ganwaria [After Srivastava, 1996: 62]

10.4.6 Houses

Leaving aside the urban centres in the Taxila valley (see Unit 14 for a detailed discussion), considerable information on houses comes principally from Sonkh, Indor Khera and Bhita. As mentioned earlier, evidence for well-planned baked brick houses at Sonkh comes from about the second century BCE. Typically, a house (Block A) at Sonkh could have seven rooms, arranged along a rectangular inner courtyard measuring 5.0 metres × 9.5 metres (see **Figure 10.8**).

The access to this house from road 1 (nearly 4.0 metres wide) was through a narrow lane (0.8-1.0 metres wide) leading to the courtyard (Härtel, 1993: 36). In the northeast corner there was another access through a narrow path (about 1.0 metre wide) leading to road 4 (nearly 4 m wide). In the north was a large rectangular room (2.50 metres × 6.50 metres) with carefully laid brick flooring and remains of a possible bench of hard clay, which opened onto the inner courtyard. The paving in the inner courtyard necessitated the laying of a drainage channel which continued northwards under the paved flooring

of the large room and then possibly through an opening in the northern wall onto road 4. Next to the drainage channel was embedded a large soakage jar. The eastern limit of the courtyard was set by a long wall without any opening, possibly serving as a partition wall between Houses A and B. Heaps of roof tiles lying on the floor of the courtyard were found in front of this partition wall. Immediately to the east of House B was House C, the remains of which are too scanty. Separating House C and House D was a 2.0 metres wide lane. In fact House D (measuring 11.75 metres × 15.0/13.75 metres) seems to be open on all four sides. While Houses A and B could be accessed through a narrow lane, the entrance to House D was through a very large outer courtyard (11 metres × 4.50/5.30 metres) abutting road 4. On the southern side of the outer courtyard was a door through which one entered the inner courtyard (11.75 metres × 9.25 metres). All the seven rooms opened onto this inner courtyard. Most of the rooms were of similar size (5.0-5.5 square metres) except one smaller room (1.5 metres × 1.9 metres) in the southwest corner that had a ring-well and a water jar. Unlike the public well mentioned earlier this was clearly a private well solely for the residents of House D. The remains of the roof, pieces of roof tiles, ridge tiles and pinnacles, were found in several rooms. In the inner court was found a large storage jar. There were also traces of fireplaces in the outer and inner courts, apart from a brick firing facility (hearth/*chullah*) in the middle room of the southern row.

Figure 10.8: Houses at Sonkh [After Härtel, 1993: 36]

At Indor Khera parts of seven houses were excavated in an area of about 465 square metres (see **Figure 10.9**). Walls in all cases were oriented in the cardinal directions. These were constructed both of mud-bricks as well as burnt bricks. Mud-bricks measured about 38-42 centimetres × 22-24 centimetres × 5-6 centimetres, while the baked bricks measured 36-44 centimetres × 22-24 centimetres × 5-6 centimetres. There were also traces of mud plaster on the bricks. Two types of floors were recovered, of which the majority were of packed yellow mud. The second type, of which only one example has been found, was of crushed rammed potsherds or terracotta nodules, giving a pinkish appearance. No roofing material was found in the excavations. Considering the evidence that has been found, it is difficult to say whether these houses had more than one storey.

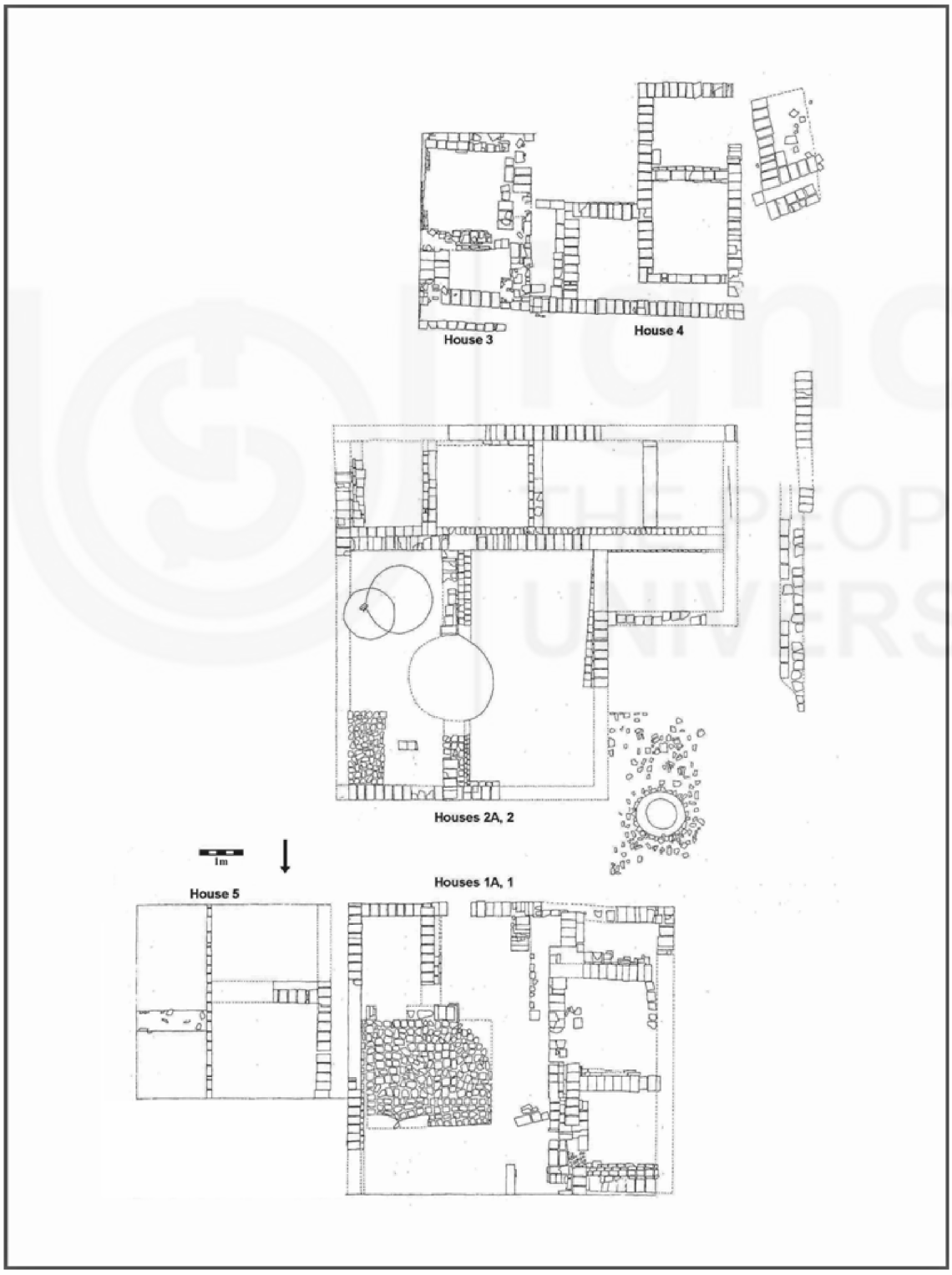

Figure 10.9: Houses at Indor Kheda [IDK, Plan 1] [Plan by Supriya Varma]

To get a better idea about the houses at Indor Khera, two of them which were built one above the other will be discussed in some detail. The portions of the northernmost house, that is, House 1A (see **Figure 10.10**) occupied an area of about 65.25 square metres (8.70 metres × 7.50 metres). All the walls were constructed of baked bricks. This is however not the complete house as it was not possible to excavate to the north and west as the mound had been cut away in recent times. To the south lay House 2A, that was separated from House 1A by an open space measuring about 2.70 metres in width. The excavators have identified three rooms as well as a possible interior open space/courtyard, the latter measuring at least 8.87 square metres (Varma and Menon, 2015). A separate part of the inner court was a baked brick platform, measuring about 8.60 square metres (3.25metres × 2.65 metres), constructed of large brickbats laid flat. Thus, the interior open area was at least 17.47 square metres. From the inner court was a possible entrance into the open area to the south. However, the excavators are not sure whether this was the only entrance into the house or there were others in the north or the west. Another entrance within House 1A led from the brick paved area into room 1. A third entrance led from the interior open space into room 3. This interior open space was clearly an area enabling movement in this part of the house as well as access to the other rooms.

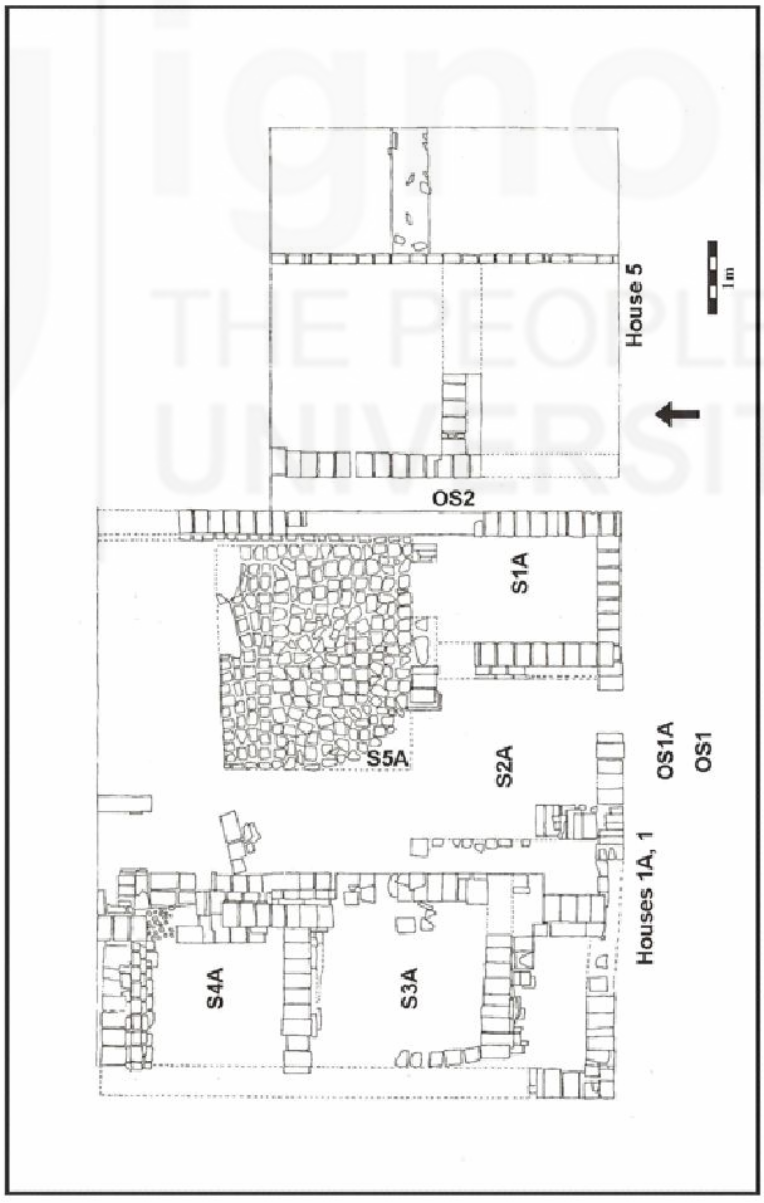

Figure 10.10: Houses 1A and 1 at Indor Khera [IDK, Plan 2][Plan by Supriya Varma]

On top of some of the walls of this baked brick house (1A), another house of mud-brick (House 1) was built, perhaps at some point in the early centuries CE. There may have been a shrinking in the size of the house, as no walls were found in the northern area. The mud-brick walls were also built about 20 centimetres both northwards and eastwards of the baked brick walls. The household of House 1 seems to have shifted the northern and southern walls of room 1 by constructing new walls of baked brick. Thus, there seems to have been a difference in the manner of construction between the two houses. In the case of House 1A, all the walls were made of burnt bricks. On the other hand the walls of House 1 were largely made of mud bricks, although there is one room that had a single wall made of mud-brick and the other three walls of burnt bricks. Not only this, all the three entrances were blocked off at this stage to construct House 1. This building of a new house over an earlier one and the blocking off of the entrances could indicate a generational shift of the original household. To the east of House 1, portions of another house (House 5) were exposed. An open space of about 0.50 metres lay between Houses 1 and 5.

From Bhita we have detailed information about six houses belonging to different phases (Marshall, 1915). The earliest complete house (termed by the excavator as 'House of the Guild') has been dated to the Mauryan period and is built of baked bricks. The plan of this house consisted of an open rectangular courtyard, bound by twelve rooms on all four sides. The excavator has reported that the walls of the rooms on the southeastern side are thicker and have deeper foundations, thereby indicating that there may have been a second storey. However, this house had ceased to exist by the first century BCE when there was more extensive construction of baked brick houses. Of the six complete houses that were excavated, five were built in the first century BCE. Immediately to the northwest of the 'House of the Guild' was built a house termed 'House of Nagadeva'. The latter was built on a slightly different plan. In this case in addition to the basic plan of eleven rooms around an inner courtyard, there were three rooms in front and these were separated from the rest of the house by another open courtyard. The house was accessed from a wide road and on two sides there were narrow lanes. To its southeast where the 'House of Guild' had once stood, but which had collapsed by the time the 'House of Nagadeva' was built, was the third open courtyard (see **Figure 10.11**). It is likely that the three rooms in the front were used for crafting activities, although the excavator has interpreted them as shops. We need to keep in mind that in the ancient past most of the craft production took place within households. It is also likely that in some houses there may have been separate work and living areas while in others the production space may have juxtaposed with the living arrangements as has been observed at Indor Khera. (Varma and Menon, 2015)

A significant point about house planning is that all the houses, whether at Sonkh, Indor Khera or Bhita, appear to be independent spatially, with no use of party walls. The lack of party walls at these Early Historic urban centres, unlike those of the Harappan period, does seem to indicate a level of architectural independence of houses and households. However, while there may have been this kind of independence, this by no means suggests lack of social connections between households; in fact, it appears from the shared use of open spaces for household and craft activities at least from Indor Khera that there was considerable interaction between adjacent households. It also needs to be pointed out that the differences in house sizes need not be taken as a measure of wealth differences. Very much the same range of artefacts was found in houses of different sizes. This may suggest that the difference in sizes of houses may relate more to household size than anything else.

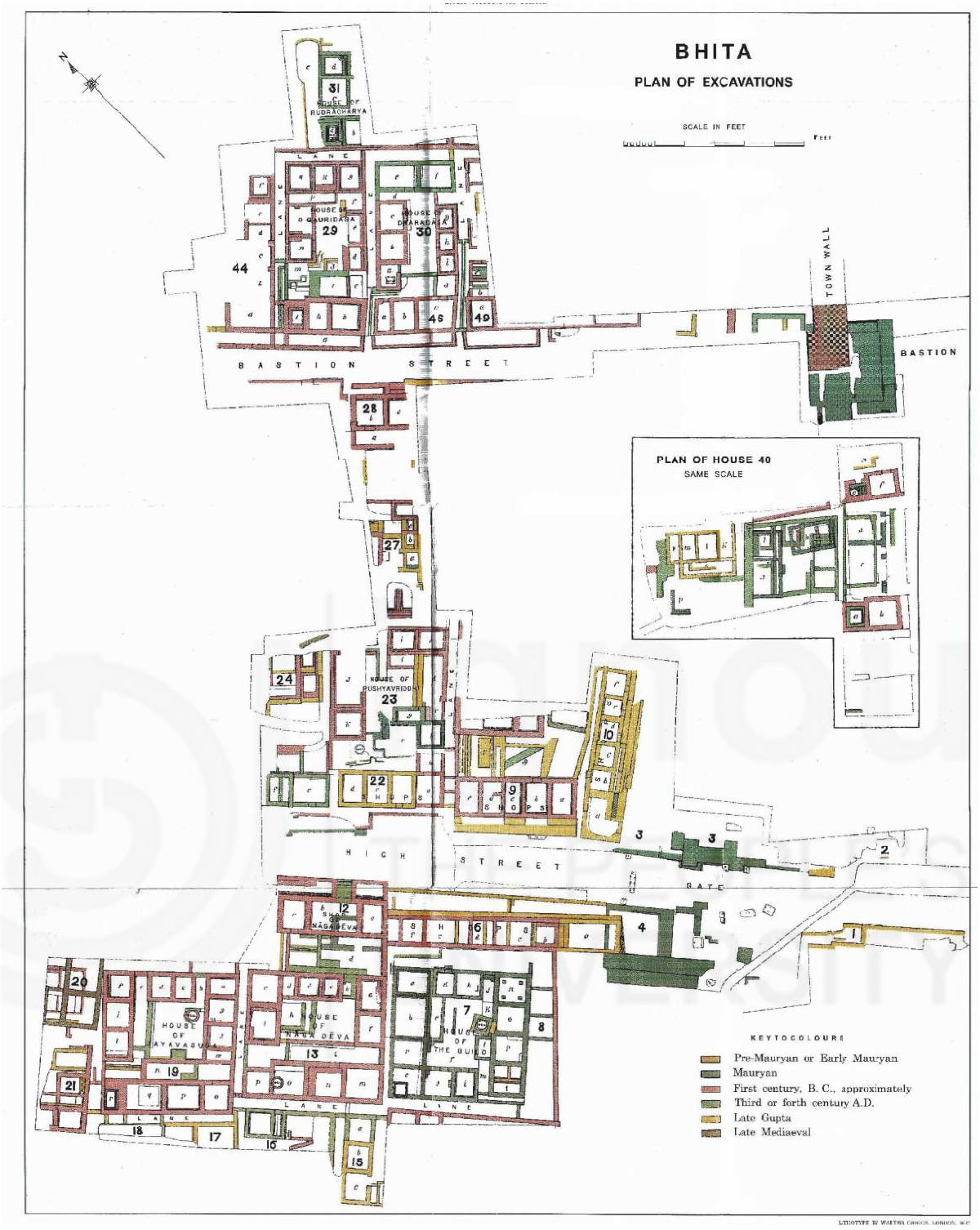

Figure 10.11: Houses at Bhita [After Marshall, 1915: Plate XIII]

10.4.7 Craft Production

Urban centres are often the loci of political, ritual and craft activities. Craft indicators have been identified at several sites as early as Marshall's (1915) work at Bhita. These include moulds for printing on cloth or pottery, crucibles and 'jeweller's melting pots' and 'dabbers'. Although some of these objects are mentioned in relation to a house, we do not have more specific information as to their exact location vis-à-vis rooms or open spaces. Moreover, the concentration remained focused on stray artefacts rather than documenting other kinds of evidence such as debitage or waste. The same kind of information has been cited from the urban centres in the Taxila valley (Marshall, 1951). Pottery stamps, which indicate evidence for pottery production, have been reported

from Mathura too but with no discussion about the context of these finds (*IAR*, *1973-74*: 32). However, some recent excavations have presented a different picture. At Sonkh, for example, craft indicators such as 'dabbers' have been retrieved and recorded contextually. Numerous other craft indicators such as pottery moulds, pottery stamps and coin moulds have also been documented (Härtel, 1993).

Evidence for glass production has been noted at Kopia in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Recent excavations at the site have revealed indicators for glass working in the form of a furnace, tuyères, pot crucibles with molten glass and thousands of chunks and wasters of raw glass (Kanungo, 2010; Kanungo, et al, 2010). These were found in the northwestern part of the mound outside the fortified area. Two radiocarbon dates of charcoal samples from the furnace of the second century CE suggest that production took place in the Sunga-Kushana period (200 BCE-300 CE). Though there is an oblique reference that the working and living areas were separate in the northern part of the site, there is no structural evidence for actual workshops within which glass was produced.

While substantial work has been done on Harappan crafts from the point of view of technological processes, spatial contexts and organisation, there is hardly anything that is known about aspects of technology and production in the Early Historic period. For the latter, the concentration had largely focussed on stray artefacts rather than documenting other kinds of evidence such as debitage or waste, although more contextual information on craft production in the Early Historic is beginning to emerge from sites excavated more recently. This, however, is still fragmentary in nature, in contrast to the archaeological evidence on ceramic and terracotta production from the site of Indor Khera. This is in the form of tools, such as anvils, pivot stones, pottery stamps, bone engravers, stone polishers (see **Figure 10.12**) firing facilities; lumps, rolls and pellets of clay and terracotta that represent raw material used for various processes and objects; deposits of sand used perhaps for tempering; unbaked artefacts; wasters or over-vitrified material; rejects or misshapen objects; as well as the variety of ceramic and terracotta artefacts that were being produced (Menon and Varma, 2010). More important, this range of evidence has been recovered concentrated within seven adjacent houses at the northwestern edge of the ancient town of Indor Khera.

Figure 10.12: 12a. Pivot Stone from Indor Khera; 12b. Anvil from Indor Khera; 12c. Pottery Stamp with Two Designs from Indor Khera [Photograph by Supriya Varma]

Coningham (1997) has surmised from the evidence on craft indicators from Bhita and Taxila as well as Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka that the Early Historic urban centres showed a strong preference for multiple crafts co-occurring together within the same space. Although the evidence cited for such a generalisation is too scanty and much more work needs to be done, yet he has validly pointed out that the normative pattern of space delineated for separate crafts at Early Historic urban centres as described in the *Arthaśāstra* does not show up archaeologically.

10.5 DEBATES ON EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES

There are two aspects of the Early Historic urban centres about which there is little controversy. The first is that many of them were either centres of political power or were directly linked to them and the second is that very often they were located along trade routes. What is also important to note is that long distance trade, whether with the Roman world, Central Asia or within the subcontinent, contributed to urban growth, particularly in the period between 200 BCE and 300 CE. While a fair amount of attention has been paid to the trading networks with the Roman world or Central Asia, not enough archaeological research has been done to bring out the details of trade within different parts of the subcontinent. It has been rightly pointed out by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (1994a: 179) that it was this wide exchange network within the subcontinent that accounts for a remarkable uniformity in material culture across Early Historic sites. However it is only when artefacts and ceramics across sites are closely examined will we have a better idea about the linkages that existed locally, within a region or across different regions. It has also been pointed by Chattopadhyaya that the initial phase (600-300 BCE) of Early Historical urbanism had the middle and upper Ganga valley as a distinct epicenter. Further it was in the subsequent phases (300-100 BCE and 100 BCE-300 CE) that urbanism in stages spread to other parts of the subcontinent. It may be added that apart from the upper and middle Ganga valley, another region where urban centres emerged between 600-300 BCE was the northwestern part of the subcontinent.

There is some debate among historians about the extent of decline of urbanism in the period between 300 CE and 1000 CE. While R. S. Sharma (1987) held that all the urban centres in north India had declined, Chattopadhyaya (1994b: 151) has argued instead that not only did some of the earlier urban centres survive but that new urban centres, like Ahar (near Anupshahar) and Sankara in Aligarh district, also emerged in this period. As most of the Early Historic urban centres were closely linked with the successive political powers, be it the *mahajanapadas*, Mauryans, Shakas, Kushans or Guptas, their fortunes were inextricably connected too.

The interconnectedness of political power, internal trade and urban centres is perhaps indicated by the remarkable parallels between Indor Khera and Sonkh (separated by a distance of a little over 100 kilometres), not only in terms of material culture but also in their histories. For instance at both these sites the earliest occupation began in the Iron Age (often identified by the Painted Grey Ware) and towns emerged around the second century BCE. From about the fourth century CE, there was little evidence of regular remains of houses at both Sonkh and Indor Khera; instead several unconnected walls were recovered in the levels until the tenth century CE. Thereafter, once again houses were exposed but from then on, both at Sonkh and IndorKhera, their alignments were diagonal to the cardinal directions. Carlleyle (1879), while quoting from the historical memoir of Kuar Lachman Singh of Bulandshahar, mentions that Dôr Rajputs from Rajasthan are believed to have settled in this area around the end of the tenth century

CE. In contrast, houses at both these sites in the period between the second century BCE and the third century CE were always built in the cardinal directions and through successive building phases. In the upper levels of the mound, at least on the northern edge, there is evidence of a medieval fort, which is held to have been renovated during Jahangir's time by a local chief Ani Rai, of Anupshahar. Härtel (1993) has suggested that Sonkh emerged as a town from about the end of the second century BCE and continued as an urban centre till the third century CE. Thereafter there is evidence of destruction and decay, leaving nothing but fragments of mostly unconnected walls from about the fourth till the tenth centuries CE. There may have been a short period of abandonment, which was then followed by the construction of a caravanserai and slightly later by residential areas in the period between the tenth and sixteenth centuries CE. However from then on the older alignment of cardinal directions was no longer followed; instead the houses were built diagonally to the cardinal directions. Still later, a fortress of baked bricks was built either during the time of Sher Shah or the Mughals. Finally in the seventeenth century the brick fortification was converted into a mud fort and a moat was added.

Further, within specific micro regions, as one urban centre declined, another may have emerged in close vicinity. For example, in the middle Ganga-Kalinadi doab area, Indor Khera existed as a small urban centre between 200 BCE and 300 CE. In the early medieval period, it appears that a new urban centre arose at Ahar, about 25 kilometres to the northeast of Indor Khera along the bank of the Ganges river. Ten inscriptions have been found from this centre, Ahar, that have been dated between 867 and 904 CE, which suggests it may have been part of the Gurjara-Pratihara empire. These inscriptions name this settlement as Tattānandapura (Chattopadhyaya, 1994b). While we know that Ahar was a *qasba* in the Mughal period, we do not as yet have any information about its history in the intervening period. It also seems that a *qasba* came up at Debai, about 7 kilometres to the south-east of Indor Khera, in the first half of the fourteenth century CE. All this suggests that even within a micro-region, the loci of urban centres may shift periodically depending on the larger political and economic requirements and dynamics. Instead of visualising distinct phases of urbanisation (early historic) and deurbanisation/urban decay (early medieval), we need to look at the lateral shifts in the location of urban centres that were taking place. While in the early historic period, Indor Khera was the urban centre for this micro-region, in the early medieval period, it was Ahar. Chattopadhyaya (1994b) in response to the issue of urban decay has noted the emergence of several urban centres in early medieval north India, such as Prthudaka (Pehoa) in Karnal district, Siyadoni in Jhansi district and Gopagiri (Gwalior). However, what have so far not been worked out are the lateral shifts taking place at the micro level, over a period of time. Apart from location, the nature of urban centres would have also varied. For example, what little we already know, from the archaeological and inscriptional evidence, suggests that Indor Khera and Ahar were very different kinds of urban centres. The urban experience too at these urban centres would have been distinct. It is only when archaeological studies involving intensive and extensive surveys as well as focussed excavations in a micro-region are undertaken will we move towards a better understanding of early urban histories.

10.6 SUMMARY

The first wave of urbanisation disappeared around 1900 BCE which resurfaced after a gap of 1400 years in the Ganga valley around 500 BCE. In the present Unit Early Historic urban centres have been studied through archaeological data. How Early Historic cities were represented in the texts would form part of the discussion of Unit 13. However, very limited archaeological excavations have been carried out so far to help

us better understand the growth of Early Historic urban centres. Historians have linked the emergence of Early Historic urban centres to iron technology. However, archaeologists have questioned the possible role of iron in the emergence of urban centres. Whatever the reasons, this period saw the emergence of numerous urban centres, some as large as Pataliputra (1200 hectares) to smaller towns like Bhita (19 hectares) and Indor Khera (12 hectares). While the cities were largely fortified, settlements in many cases extended outside the fortified walls too. Some cities like Sirkap and Shaikhan Dheri show elements of planning, which suggest the role of political authority in the emergence of these particular urban settlements. Interestingly, craft production appears to have been organised within houses at several urban centres. While some of the Early Historic cities were centres of power, others were located along trade routes.

10.7 EXERCISES

1) What are settlement pattern studies? Discuss surveys and excavations undertaken with regard to Early Historic urban centres.

2) What was the basis of Erdosy's survey? What methodology was adopted by him to analyse the Early Historic urban centres in the Ganga valley? What were his findings?

3) What were the factors responsible for the emergence of cities and towns in north India around 500 BCE?

4) What role did iron technology play in the formation of Early Historic cities in the Ganga valley?

5) How have archaeologists characterised Early Historic urban centres in north India?

6) Discuss the chief characteristics of Early Historic urban centres between 500 BCE to 500 CE in the Ganga valley.

7) Examine the spaces outside the urban centres of the Early Historic period.

8) Was there an element of planning in the Early Historic urban centres of the Ganga valley?

9) Examine the housing patterns of Early Historic urban centres in the Ganga valley.

10) The spatial pattern delineated for separate crafts in the *Arthaśāstra* does not show up archaeologically at the Early Historic urban centres. Comment.

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UNIT 11 ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY CITIES AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES: SOUTH INDIA*

Structure

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11.1 INRODUCTION

The *Early Historic* may not have had identical connotations for North and South India. For a better understanding of urbanisation in the South it would be incumbent to begin with a brief introduction on what the *Early Historic* and the phenomenon of urbanisation stand for in North India. Terminologically, the most accepted chronology for the Early Historic in North India is the period BCE 600-300 CE. However there are opinions to the contrary. Some scholars prefer to stretch it back to 1000 BCE, based on the first appearance of Vedic literary works. Scholars like R.S. Sharma even go beyond 6th century CE, when defining this phase. Others distinguish between the Early Historic and the Late Historic, the former seen as extending till 4th century CE, incorporating the Gupta period, while the latter includes the post-Gupta period. Archaeologists have often seen this entire period in terms of the Iron age.

The process of urbanisation during this period in North India has been worked upon by archaeologists who are more or less in agreement regarding its salient features by initially

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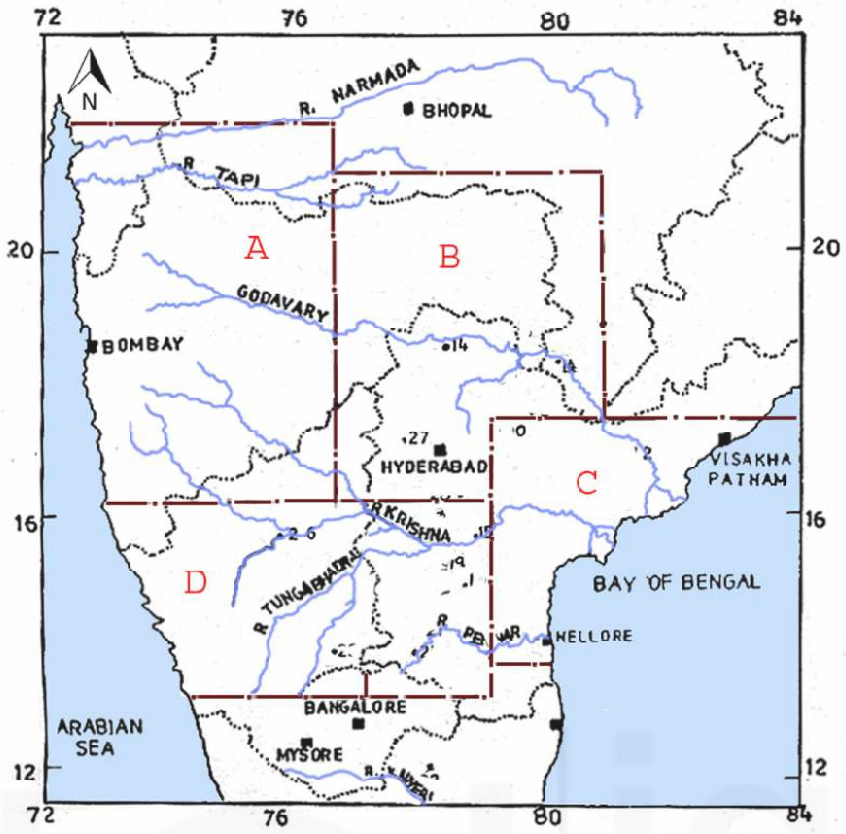
starting with Childe's criteria of ten points for marking out an early city as the basis of their characterisation. These in the north Indian context may be listed as: large settlements (often determined on the basis of area) with a degree of internal planning; defenses encircling the settlement; public architecture (e.g. walls and tanks); use of stone, mud and fired bricks, and increasing use of iron; the appearance of certain uniform traits in material culture like cast copper and punch-marked silver coins, a distinctive ceramic type like the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) along with the continued presence of Painted Grey Ware (PGW); development of private and public hydraulic features; a highly developed craft industry as seen from standardised items of production; long distance trade; a unified system of weights and measures; and a written script. All these features of course did not appear at the same point of time. It can however, be safely said that by about 3rd century CE all these features had made their appearance in North India.

Some of these criteria, scholars point out, demand debate. For example, size has been often taken as a criterion in drawing a settlement hierarchy of early cities or urban centres in the Ganga valley. Very seldom have archaeologists concerned themselves with internal organisation of space within a city or urban centre. Distinctions between urban and non-urban space have rarely been specified. Only the presence of indicators mentioned above, in variable quantities does not explain the phenomenon of urbanisation. There is also a greater need to look for spatial and temporal differences in the sub-continent. In the present survey we shall see how Peninsular or South India cannot be seen as a homogeneous entity either. Neither can it be assessed by parameters listed above. The entire region is seen in terms of two blocks: (i) the Deccan, incorporating the modern states of Maharashtra, Karnatak and Andhra Pradesh and (ii) early *Tamilakam* incorporating the modern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Historians prefer to see the Deccan not as one unitary whole but in terms of further sub-regional divisions and 'localities'. The Unit is divided into two sections: (I) the processes of emergence of urbanisation and (II) characteristics of early urban centres.

11.2 THE PROCESSES OF EMERGENCE OF URBANISATION: THE DECCAN

Some historians have been critical of tendencies to view the Deccan region as only a bridge in transmitting the highly-evolved forms of the North Indian civilisation to the extreme South, and refuse to see the development of the Early Historic period in the Deccan solely in terms of such external stimuli. Rather they focus on internal processes of change, operative within the region. Traditional scholarship had two principal preoccupations: one, to establish the Satavahana chronology on a firmer footing from numismatic and epigraphic evidence; and two, to focus on studies of the numerous Buddhist rock-cut caves of Western Deccan. The different sub-regions of the Deccan and their respective cultural patterns which often show a lot of diversity were not highlighted. In fact the processes of urbanisation are to be understood, keeping this diversity in mind. Geographically, the Deccan extends from the land south of the Vindhyas up to the Krishna-Tungabhadra basin. It has been divided into four sub-regions: the Eastern Deccan, characterised by low-lying hills and ranges and the plains of Godavari and Krishna; the Western Deccan, marked by the Western ghats as its western boundary and characterised by the river valleys of Tapti, Bhima, Godavari and Krishna; the Southern Deccan or the Mysore Plateau region; and the Central Deccan or the Hyderabad-Telengana plateau region. While agreeing on sub-regional differences, one can look instead at the possibility of existence of several 'localities' in the Deccan. We shall look at its implications below.



List of Sites

1. Pedabankur
2. Polakonda I
3. Kadambapur
4. Pochampadu
5. Kotilingala I&II
6. Paithan
7. Warangal
8. Karimnagar
9. Dhulikatta
10. Kondapur
11. Karnamamidi
12. Chinnabankur
13. Vemunuru
14. Ter
15. Utnur
16. Kupgal
17. Hallur
18. Piklihal
19. Tekkalakota I&II
20. Sangankallu I
21. Brahmagiri
22. T Narsipur
23. Maski
24. Chandravalli
25. Banavasi
26. Vadgaon Madhavpur
27. Sannati
28. Koedekal

Map 11.1: The Deccan (After Aloka Parasher-Sen, (ed.), (1993) *Social and Economic History of Early Deccan: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi: Manohar, Map II.)

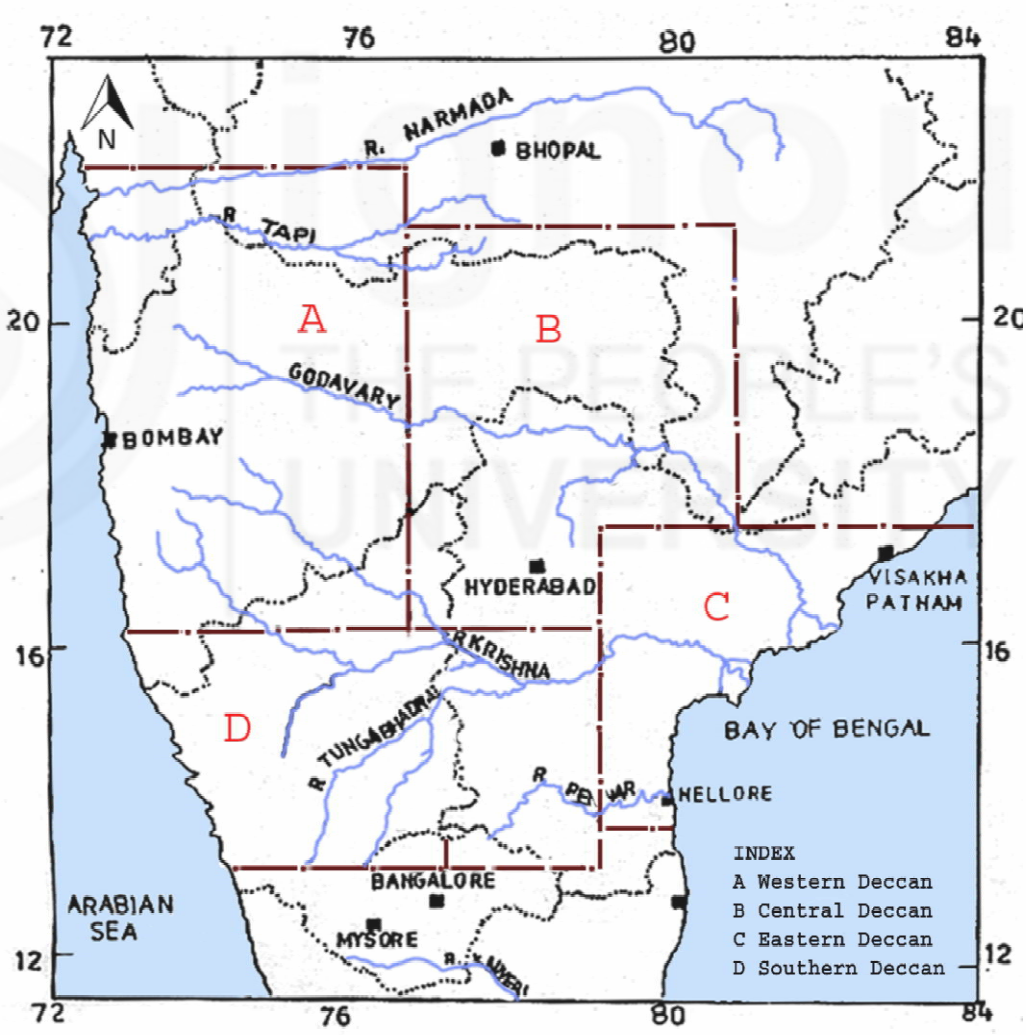
While we shall try to see how each sub-region of the Deccan throws up different cultural patterns, it would be worthwhile to note here the limitations of sources. Archaeological evidence is far from complete and in many situations quite fragmentary, in the absence of problem-oriented excavations. Unlike the *Sangam* texts dealing with Tamilakam there are no texts specific to the region in this period.

11.2.1 The Southern and Central Deccan

Dubbed as 'areas of relative isolation' the Southern and Central Deccan (the landmass between Godavari and Krishna valleys covering the districts of Parbhani, Aurangabad, Nanded, Buldhana, Latur, Sholapur, Osmanabad in Maharashtra and Bijapur and parts of Gulbarga districts in Karnataka) may be taken up together as having one thing in common – they had neither large tracts of alluvial soil, as seen in Eastern Deccan, nor strategically located port towns as in the Western Deccan. Megalithic cultures associated with burials or commemorative pillars like menhirs and distinctive material traits like Black and Red ware and iron tools succeed the Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlement in the Deccan around 1000 BCE.To understand the processes of emergence of urbanisation one needs to look at the transition from this phase to the beginnings of historical cultures, known rather uniformly in the Deccan from the pre-Satavahana and Satavahana layers of habitation (3rd and 2nd century BCE-1st century BCE onwards).

In the Southern Deccan this succession is seen variously in a cluster of sites at Maski, Brahmagiri, Piklihal, Tekkalakota, Sanganakallu and Hallur. Asokan inscriptions are particularly situated around the two sites of Maski and Brahmagiri. These areas therefore may have had some structure of political, economic and social organisation that prompted Asoka to inscribe his message of *dhamma*. Among these Brahmagiri, excavated by Wheeler, remains to- date the most extensively excavated site. Undertaken primarily to understand the Megalithic culture, the excavation of this site revealed, according to

Wheeler, remains of an early historical 'town-site.' This was identified with Isila, mentioned in Asoka's Minor Rock Edict I. However, 'extensive signs of ancient population' at this level are only indicated by potsherds, fragmentary walls and remains of small terraced platforms. The last phase of the Megalithic culture overlaps with the Early Historic, i.e., shows an intermixture of cultural deposits. At the other sites, barring Maski the material prosperity ebbs away during the Early Historic. The 'urban' characteristics seen at Brahmagiri identified with the Satavahana layers of habitation are found at a few other sites in this region like Chandravalli, Banavasi, Vadagaon-Madhavpur and Sannati. Interestingly at none of these sites antecedent stages of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic or the Megalithic/Iron age exist. The archaeological evidence is far from adequate to comment any further on this variance. But what significantly emerges is that there was no uniform transition to the Early Historic urban phase. Recent interpretation of numismatic evidence has brought to light evidence of pre-Satavahana chiefs after the megalithic phase who issued their own coins from the 2nd century BCE. These pre-Satavahana Kura, Sadakana and Hastin coins point to the existence of *janapada*-like localities and possibly a proto-state formation prior to the crystallisation of the pan-Deccan empire of the Satavahanas.



Map 11.2: The Southern and Central Deccan [After Aloka Parasher-Sen, (ed.), (1993) *Social and Economic History of Early Deccan: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi: Manohar, Map. III.]

In Central Deccan no direct evidence of Mauryan presence is found. The major early historical sites are Peddabunkur, Dhulikatta, Kondapur and Kotalingala. A considerable amount of iron objects were present at all these sites except Kotalingala. The location

of Megalithic settlements in Central Deccan including the Vidarbha region was in the midst of an iron-rich region, this had a definite impact on the proliferation of settlements in the Early Historical period. Kotalingala yielded significant numismatic evidence of several pre-Satavahana coins found with early Satavahana ones in a stratified context. This evidence is outstanding in reconstructing the pre-Satavahana history of the region, lending further support to the picture emerging from Southern Deccan. Pre-Satavahana elements are seen in evidence of fort-like defence structures at Kotalingala and Dhulikatta, certain Buddhist edifices at Dhulikatta and Kondapur, and 'mint-centres at Peddabankur and Kondapur. The collective evidence is suggestive of growth of a polity rooted in kin ties, and settlements that may be best described as proto-urban. The substratum of the polity could either have been an agricultural economy or one with a pastoral base. The political power base was of course segmented which changed under new forces of social change when these groups interacted with one another to establish the larger Satavahana empire.

11.2.2 The Western Deccan

The settlement history of the Western Deccan (covering the districts of Nasik, Dhule, Pune, Satara, Kolhapur in Maharashtra and Belgaon in north Karnataka) prior to the advent of Mauryan expansion is one marked by several sedentary village communities of the Chalcolithic period, labelled by Dhavalikar as 'chiefdom'. Most of these settlements were abandoned by 700 BCE, possibly as a result of increasing aridity, as noted by Dhavalikar. However, certain regions continued to be occupied as seen in the Bhima valley. Many Chalcolithic settlements like Prakash, Nevasa and Nasik are also locales of later Satavahana cities, notwithstanding evidence of abandonment. The Megalithic traits are indistinct in the Western Deccan; a sprinkling of the typical megalithic Black-and-Red ware occurs at several sites in the Tapti valley along with iron objects. By 1000 BCE in many regions the concentration of these settlements shifted to the Vidarbha region, east of the plateau, probably because of increasing aridity. At Maheswar/ Navdatoli, on the Narmada river, a continuous occupation sequence is observed between the Chalcolithic, Iron Age and Early Historic. The archaeological evidence on the whole is inadequate to understand the period following the abandonment of the Chalcolithic settlements till the advent of the Mauryan influence and therefore, the processes of emergence of urbanisation remain imperfectly understood. Between 600/500 BCE and 300/200 BCE urban characteristics begin to appear in some sites like Baruch in coastal Gujarat and Sopara in coastal Konkan, the latter also being a site of an Asokan edict. Stupas at Navdatoli, Pauni and Kasrawad indicate the presence of Buddhism, which played an important role in the emergence of urban centres during the Satavahanas. Probably parts of Western Deccan were incorporated into state polities of varied sizes in the pre-Satavahana period. However, the precise impact of the Mauryan polity in Western Deccan is difficult to gauge. The Satavahana period was marked by expansion of urban centres and a significant increase of Buddhist structures (whose donors were merchants, crafts people, farmers outnumbering those of royalty). Many of these urban centres were located at the intersection of trade routes.

11.2.3 The Eastern Deccan

In Eastern Deccan (covering state of Andhra Pradesh) the Megalithic and early iron age is indicated in the archaeological record by two distinct contexts. In one, the material ensemble of the Megalithic/early iron age occurs mixed up with the preceding Chalcolithic material; and in the other, it immediately succeeds the Chalcolithic in a distinctly different layer, overlying the Chalcolithic one. Here we have substantial evidence of iron in association with both Megalithic habitation and burial at several sites which develop

urban characteristics in the subsequent period. As in Southern and Central Deccan we come across evidence of the existence of pre-Satavahana chiefs. The Bhattiprolu relic casket inscriptions from the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh speak of a *raja* Khubiraka (Kuberaka) who had emerged as a local ruler in the coastal region of Andhra around 2nd c. BCE. While this is extremely significant for understanding the emergence of 'localities' in the pre-Satavahana stage the archaeological evidence appears incomplete to understand the process of transition. But what can be affirmed is that there was a substantial agrarian hinterland in this region that provided the base for the emergence of urban manifestations seen in the Amaravati-Dharanikota complex, Jaggayapeta, Bhattiprolu, Ghantasala, Kesarapalli, Nagarjunakonda, Salihundam, Vaddamanu and Yelleswaram during the Satavahana times.

To sum up, the internal dynamics of urbanisation varied regionally across the Deccan, depending to some extent on the natural environment and the nature of subsistence that generated this. The urban antecedents could be traced in many of the 'localities' ruled by the local rulers between 2nd c. BCE- 1st century BCE, which perhaps saw a proto-state formation prior to the emergence of the Satavahana empire.

11.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY HISTORICAL URBAN CENTRES: THE DECCAN

Archaeologists have usually chosen certain markers of urbanisation like currency, presence of fortification and other structures, use of script, craft-specialisation as seen in beads or pottery to pronounce 'urbanness' on a particular site. In the absence of problem-oriented excavations we can very seldom form any idea of the urban lay-out or the differential use of space within the area of a site. Also, a step-by-step transformation of largely self-sufficient rural settlements into urban centres is not available from the archaeological record. Some of these characteristics were traced in the pre-Satavahana stage. For instance, mud-fortifications were reported from Dhulikatta; structural relics with Buddhist influence were seen in some Western Deccan sites like Maheshwar and Kasrawad; the presence of a series of cisterns, and brick platforms with pieces of iron slag and two ovens, are considered to be a blacksmith's forge at Peddabankur, similar features have been noted at Kondapur; the occurrence of punch-marked silver, Roman coins and Satavahana coins here, and at Kondapur is suggestive of these places being mint centres; evidence of rubble and brick construction has been seen at Kondapur. Remains of settlement have been traced at Sopara (Suparaka, the site of an Asokan edict), Bharuch (Bharukaccha) and Paithan (Pratishthana, later to become the Satavahana capital) amongst others in the Western Deccan.

Such features probably can be taken together to argue for a formative stage in urbanisation. We shall briefly discuss the 'urban' features of these sites region wise when there was a substantial expansion during the Satavahana period, before taking up the site of Nagarjunakonda, the royal seat of power of the Iksvakus. This is perhaps the only site in the Deccan where the urban configuration has been thoroughly worked out through excavation.

In the Western Deccan an expansion of settlements was reported during the Satavahanas, which also saw an emergence of a large number of monastic establishments. It has been argued that there was an intimate relationship between the emergent Buddhist monastic institutions and the rise of market centres and commercial towns, which were located close to the former. The inscriptional record testifies to the presence of a sizeable number of non-royal donors to these institutions, as represented by merchants, crafts people, farmers and others, including women.

Structurally, use of bricks was seen in houses with tiles used for roofs, the construction activity having become much elaborate during this period as seen at Nasik, Nevasa, Karad, Paithan, Ter and Bhokardhan. Fortifications occur at several sites like Bharuch, Sopara and Ter. Efflorescence in rock-cut architecture is noticed as at Junnar, the largest complex with 252 rock-cut caves, at caityas in Bhaja, Kondane, Nasik, at Kanheri, Karle and Karad where the caitya architecture reached a high level of workmanship. Inscriptional sources point to the existence of a rural hinterland of large religious centres like Junnar and Kanheri. A high degree of craft specialisation is borne out by excavations at a few sites. Ter was a centre for the production of terracotta figurines and for textiles, with vats for dying cloth found during excavation. At Bhokardan large-scale production of beads of semi-precious stones, shell and ivory, is accounted for by the presence of unfinished beads, soapstone moulds and polishers. Other sites in the Tapti valley like Prakash and Bahal yield evidence on crafts practiced such as bead making, manufacture of shells bangles, terracotta votive tanks, ivory products, bone points. A coin mould has also been found at Bhokardan. Chaul, located at the head of the Roha creek, south of Bombay provided a convenient harbor for coastal craft. By far the sole evidence of a wharf is provided by a brick structure in the now defunct Rajbandar port in Elephanta island. Sopara and Paithan are considered to have performed a multiplicity of functions, involving administrative, however, the archaeological evidence for it remains unsubstantial. Besides, a large number of sites have been found with scatters of Red Polished ware, the typical ceramic of the Satavahana period in Western Deccan. These may have represented the agricultural settlements.

In the Southern Deccan Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Sannati, Vadagaon-Madhavpur and Banavasi, Maski and Piklihal developed into full-fledged urban centres. At Sannati the remains of a Satavahana settlement are visible on the surface in remains of brick fortification and of a raised inner citadel. Both here and at Vadagaon-Madhavpur religious and secular structures have been discovered. Secular structures at Vadagaon-Madhavpur were mostly residential buildings, simple in plan, with tiled roof, generally provided with water-wells and granaries. A few were of public use.

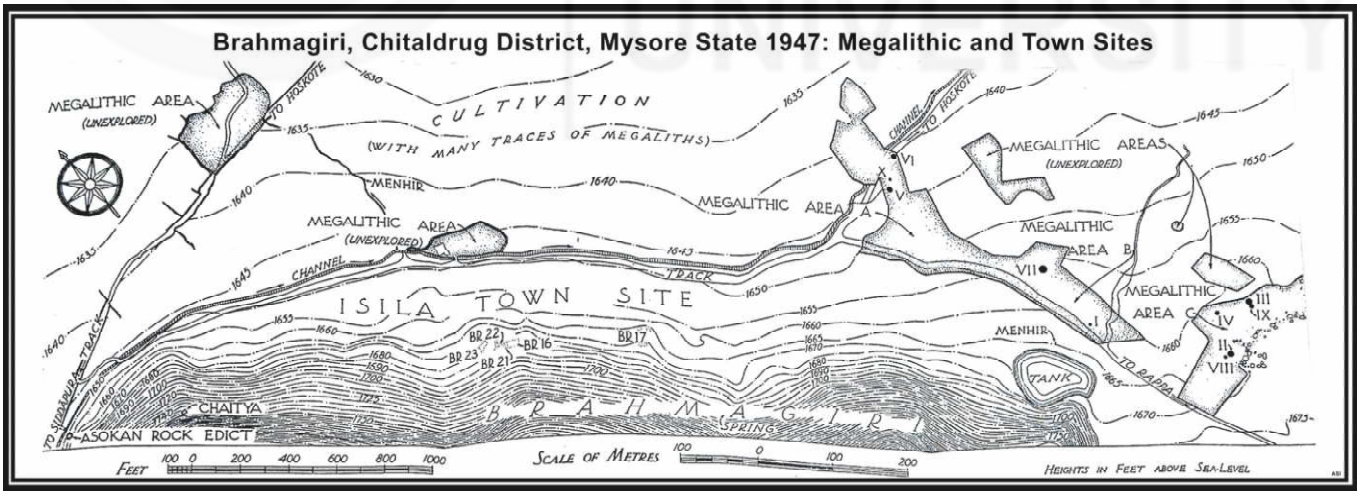


Figure 11.1: Plan of Brahmagiri [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate LXXIII, Facing page 186.]

From the excavated mound at Sannati several Satavahana coins have been found. Craft specialisation is seen in the discovery of a jeweller's mould and two small copper alloy crucibles. Finished products like bangles, rings, ear studs and beads were found along with double-moulded terracotta human and animal representations, common to all Satavahana sites. In addition to all these, a sizeable amount of coins and metal objects were found from Vadagaon-Madhavpur, including a Roman coin. Wheeler's excavations at Brahmagiri and Chandravalli were more focused on understanding the

Megalithic in the region and Roman presence, if any. Satavahana presence can be reconstructed from coins while discovery of Roman coins possibly indicates an external exchange. The characteristic ceramic types like Red Polished ware and Russet coated ware have been found at all the sites, being a marker of the Early Historic in the region.

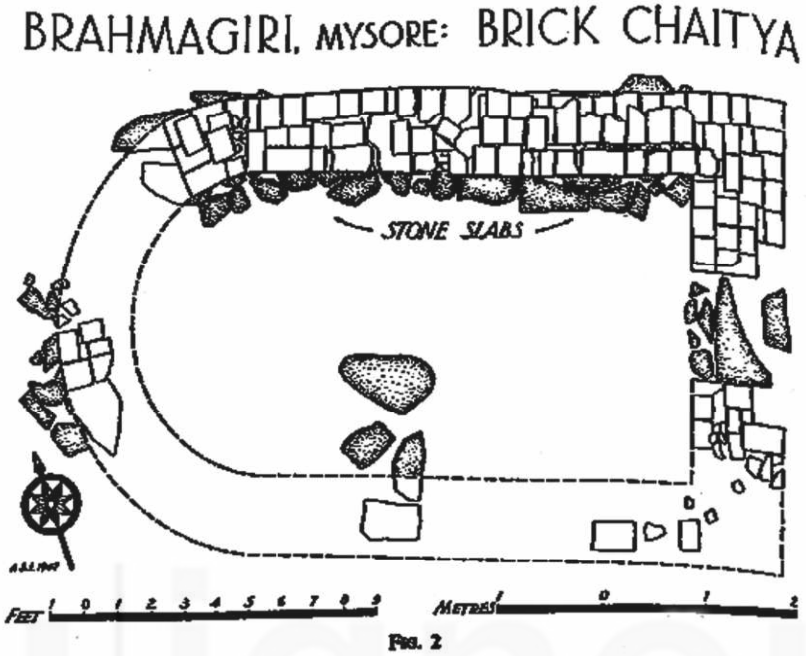


Figure 11.2: Brick Chaitya, Brahmagiri [Wheeler, 1947-48, Figure 2, p. 186]

Figure 11.3: Satavahana Coins: Chandravalli [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXXVII]

Figure 11.4: Roman Coins: Denarius of Tiberius, Chandravalli [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXXVI b]

In the Central Deccan archaeological evidence is less forthcoming in the want of intensive excavations, but the numismatic data is voluminous. We have already seen in the previous section its significance in defining the pre-Satavahana stage. In the Satavahana period Kondapur, Peddabankur, Kotalingala, Karnamamidi, Kolakonda emerged as important urban centres from the pre-Satavahana stage. Apart from the finding of typical Satavahana material like coins, terracotta figurines and ceramics, no data is available on the nature of structures.

In the Eastern Deccan the site of Nagarjunakonda on the river Krishna is a multi-cultural site, i.e., a site where more than one archaeological cultures are represented. It has habitation spanning from the prehistoric to the medieval period. But the bulk of the evidence – structural, epigraphic, numismatic, sculptural and ceramic – pertains to the Ikshvakus and their predecessors and successors. The Ikshvakus were subordinates of the Satavahanas in coastal Andhra and rose to prominence as their successors in control of lower Krishna valley in the 3rd c. CE. Their rule was abruptly brought to a close by the first quarter of 4th c. CE. The site has been identified with their capital city of Vijayapuri. Nearly 127 spots scattered over the vast area of the valley have been excavated. The occupation, in the course of time shifted from one part of the valley to another. Datable evidences are rich which have helped archaeologists to draw a chronological framework. During the Ikshvakus the metropolitan occupation was mostly along the river and in the western half of the valley. The plan of the city reveals that it had a fortified citadel area, surrounded by a habitation zone and Brahmanical and Buddhist edifices outside. The citadel shows different stages of construction. Barracks, postern gates, moats, and bastions marked out the citadel which was the site for royal ceremony and ritual. Six major clusters of structural complexes have been found inside the citadel. Amongst these one was possibly the royal residence.

A site for the *Asvamedha* sacrifice that Chamtamula I claimed, in the inscriptions, to have performed was also excavated. A provision of several water tanks and cisterns has been found for most of the structural clusters. A twenty-four pillared hall was found inside the citadel, possibly a public building. Private residential buildings, marked out in several clusters for both common people and nobles were found in different parts of the valley. Each residential structure was provided with a house-drain which was connected to the city drain. Certain structures identified as public buildings, and interpreted as centres of congregation were excavated. Ancient Vijayapuri was a renowned centre of Buddhism and Buddhist learning, also considered to be an important focus in local trade network. An amphitheatre, the only one of its kind in the sub-continent, was the

best example of public buildings. A magnificent tank reservoir with galleries on three sides and a pillared pavilion on the fourth was built in the northwestern corner of the valley. A massive dock-reservoir was seen to the north of the citadel. A large number of pillared halls have been excavated, of which one appears to be a public hall. Numerous masonry cisterns, with ornamented steps and benches with smooth floors were unearthed. Their sizes and mode of construction and location in the houses are indicative of their use for storing water brought from outside. The big rectangular tanks seen in public places were possibly public baths. A grand *ghat* has also been found.

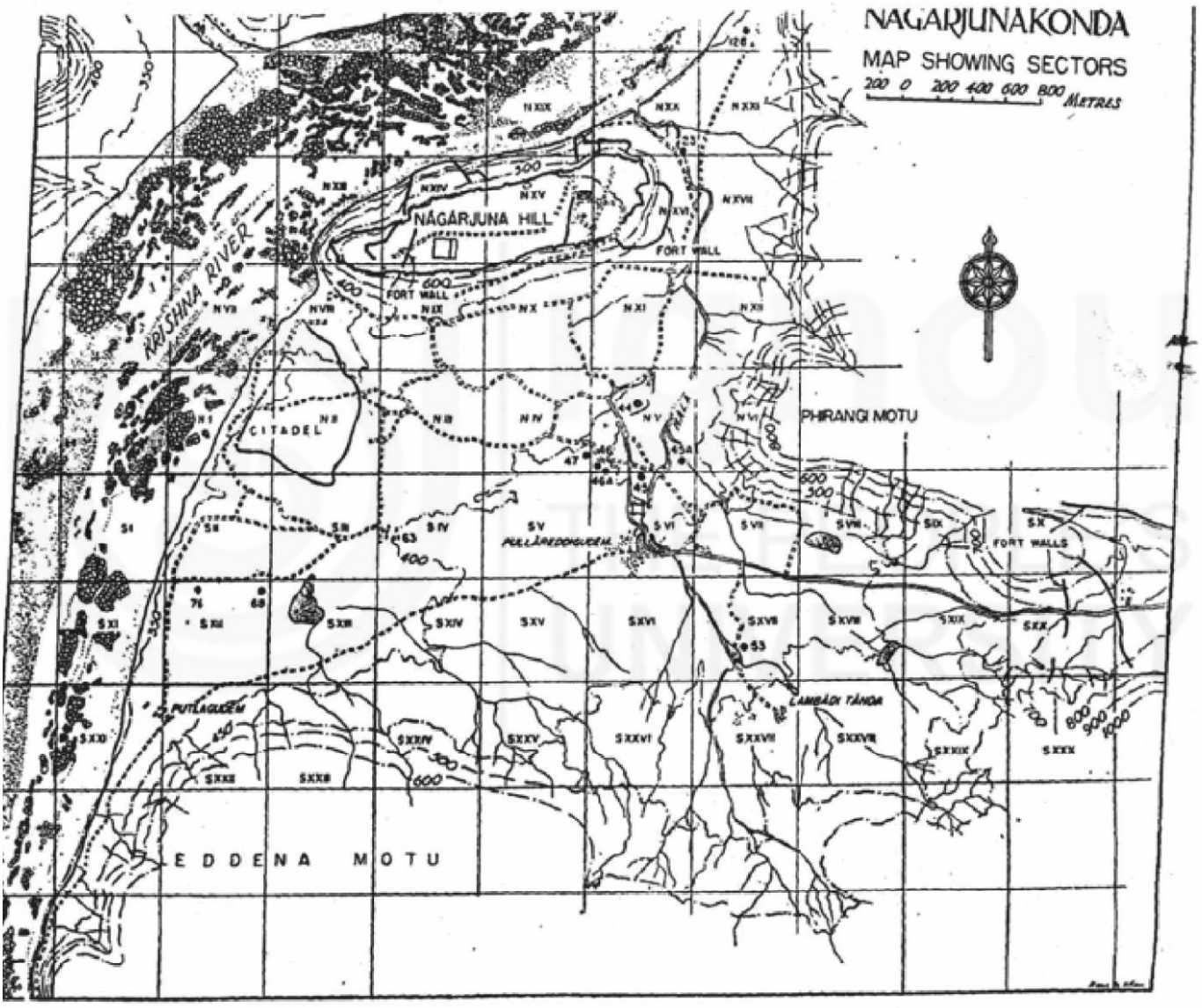


Figure 11.5: Plan of Nagarjunakonda [Subrahmanyam, R. *Nagarjunakonda (1954-60) Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 75, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1975, Figure 1]

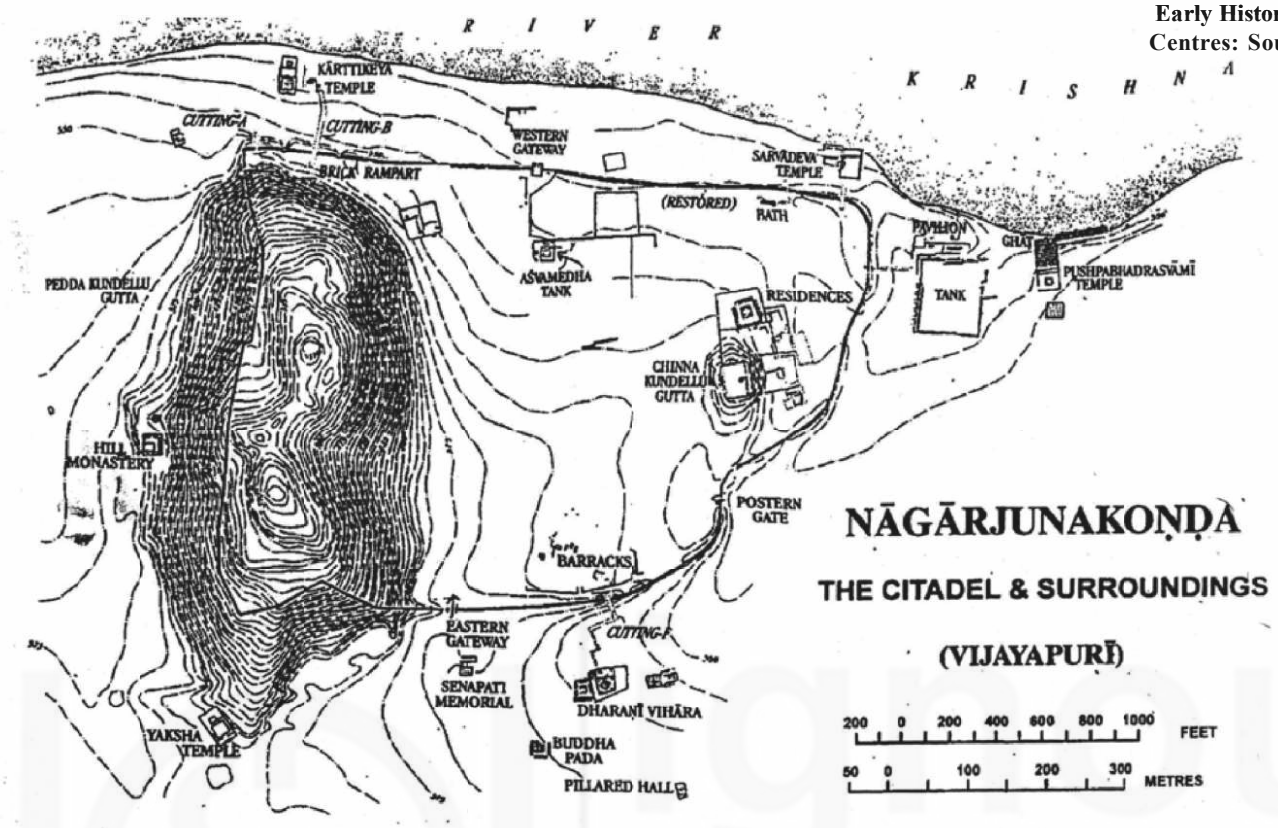


Figure 11.6: The Citadel and Its Surroundings, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Figure 20]

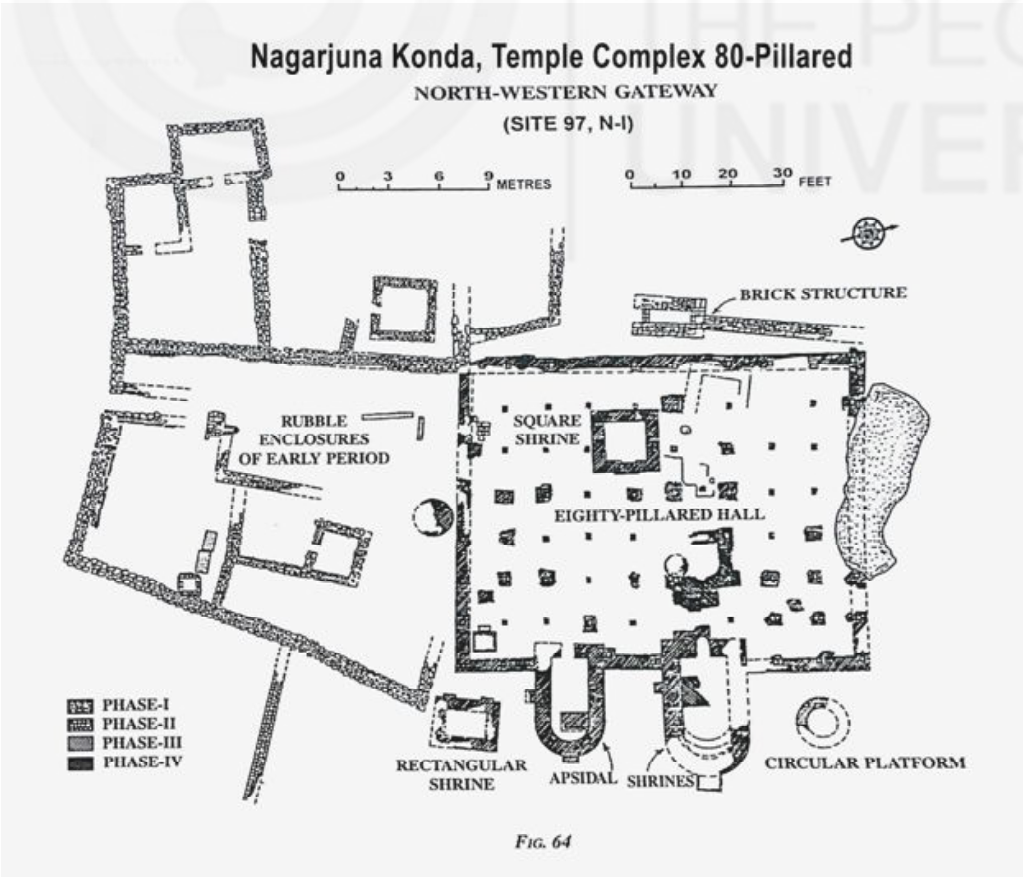


Figure 11.7: The Temple Complex 80 Pillared Hall, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Figure 64]

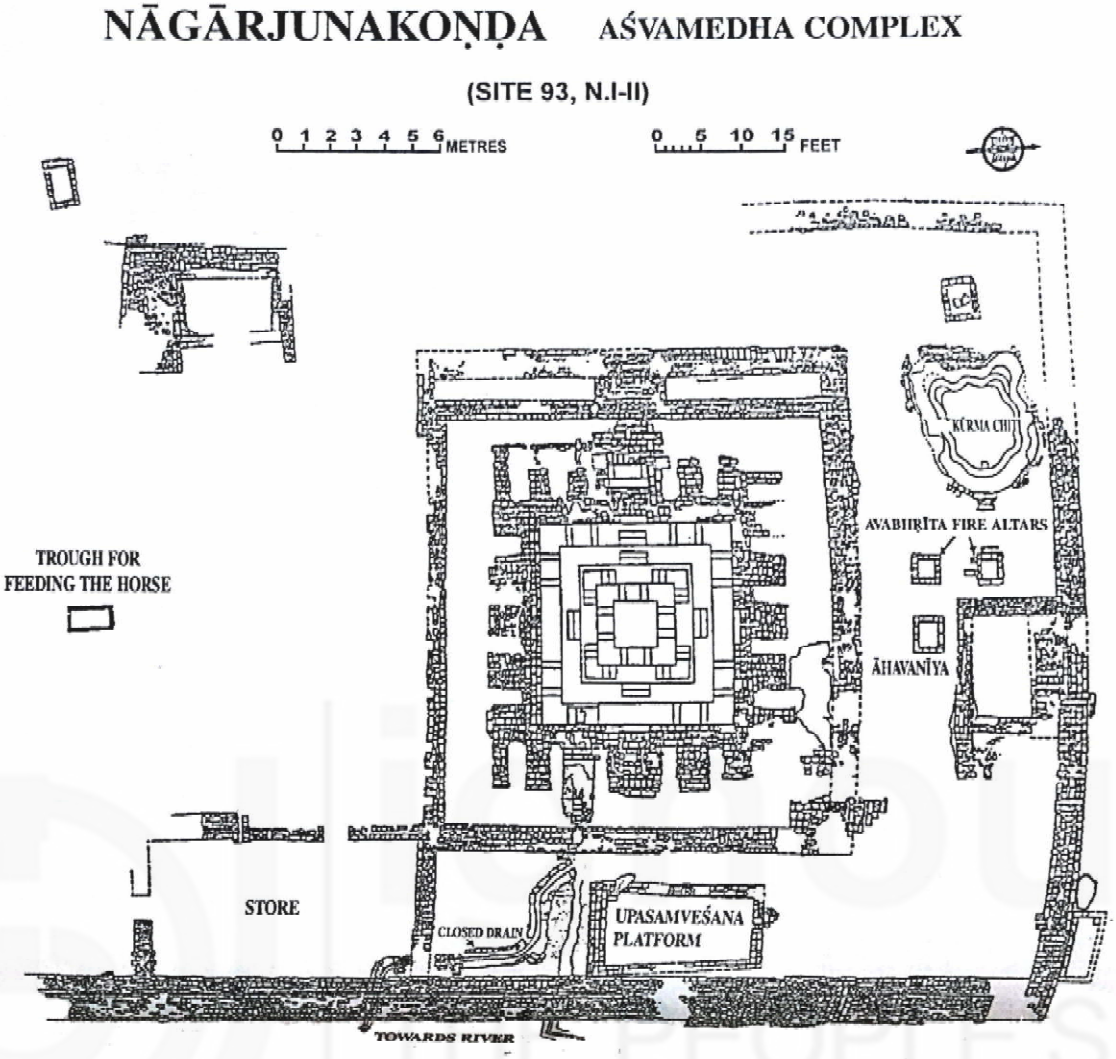


Figure 11.8: Asvamedha Complex, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Figure. 73]

Figure 11.9: The Asvamedha Site, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Plate XV]

Indication of craft specialisation may be seen in the existence of workshops of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, shell-workers, architects and stone workers. Evidence of a goldsmith's workshop is seen in crucibles, moulds, touch-stones, weights, iron hammers and terracotta bangles. Similar evidence was seen for other workshops.

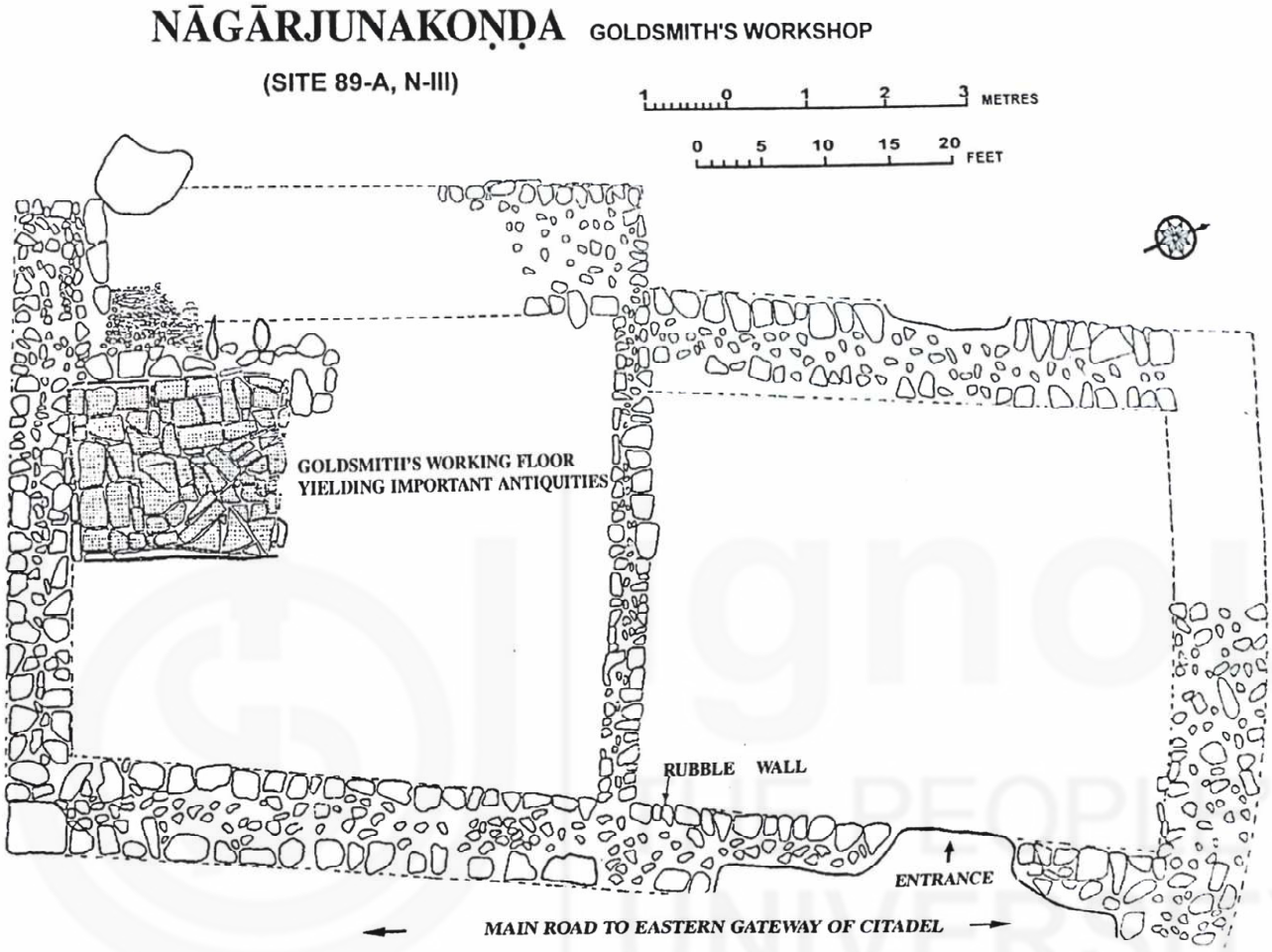


Figure 11.10a: The Plan of Goldsmith's Workshop, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Figure 33]

Figure 11.10b: The Goldsmith's Workshop, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Plate XLA]

Another structural type found in different parts of the valley is the *chaya Stambha* or memorial pillars in honour of warrior chieftains who fought for Vasishthiputra Sri Chamtamula, the founder of the Iksvaku dynasty during 210-250 CE. The later ones (250-275 CE) are referred to in inscriptions as having been constructed by the sisters, mothers and consorts of Chamtamula after his death. Four main highways have been marked by excavators during this period around the site. Evidences of *mandapas* or pillars located at cardinal points in these highways have been interpreted as rest houses.

Figure 11.11: The Chhaya Stambha, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Plate II B]

Figure 11.12: The Sculptor's Workshop, Nagarjunakonda [Soundararajan, Vol. II, 2006, Plate XL B]

In material culture the ceramic types show a homogeneous character through-out the span of Ikshvaku habitation. These are represented chiefly by plain red, Black-and-Red and black-slipped. The terracotta artefacts including human and animal figures,

suggest a direct continuation of the Satavahana terracottas. Beads were meager in quantity and not distributed uniformly through-out the valley. Stone objects show a wide range including household ones like legged querns, mullers and those used by potters like dabbers. Jewellery and other objects of copper and bronze, iron, ivory and bone indicate the richness of its material culture.

Figure 11.13: The Clay Objects, Brahmagiri [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXXVII a-b)

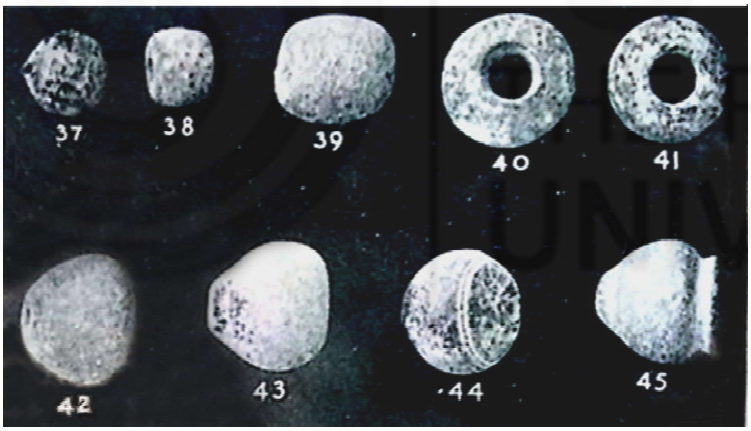


Figure 11.14: Terracotta and Stone Beads, Brahmagiri [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXX-A]

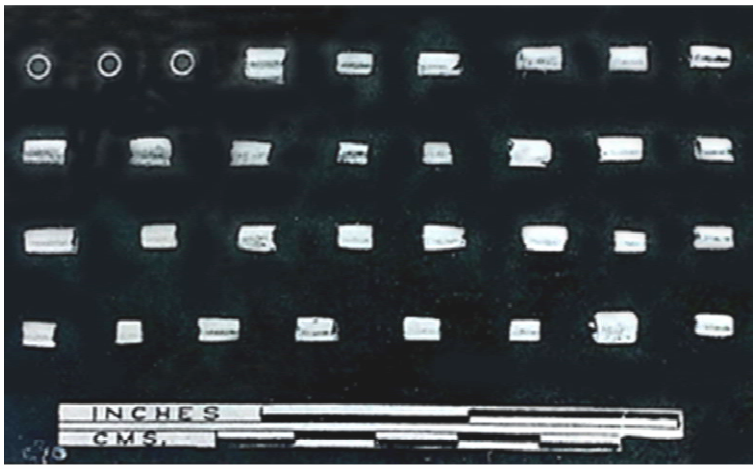


Figure 11.15: Gold Beads, Brahmagiri, [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXX-B]

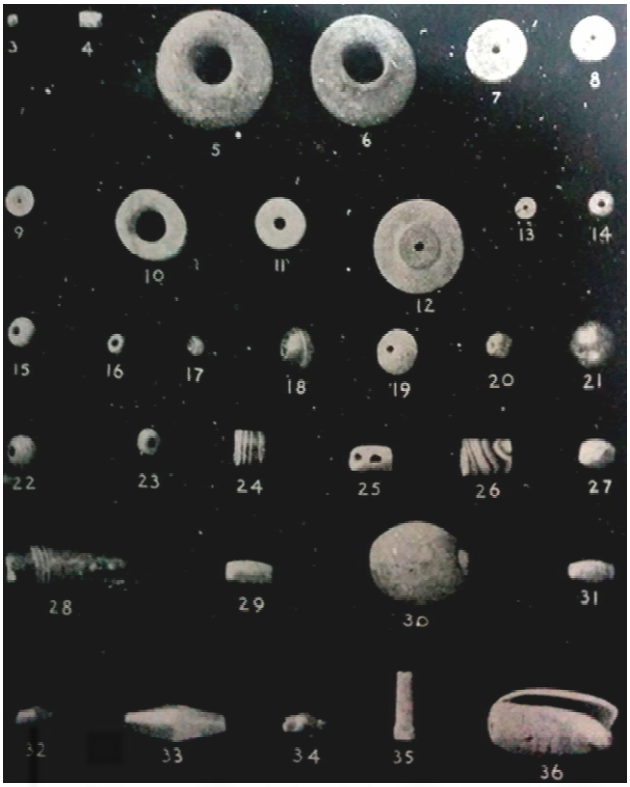


Figure 11.16: Beads from Brahmagiri [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXIX]

Figure 11.17: Painted Andhra Pottery, Chandravalli [Wheeler, 1947-48, Plate CXXV]

Figure 11.18: Decorated Pottery, Ter [Chapekar, 1959, Figure 27]

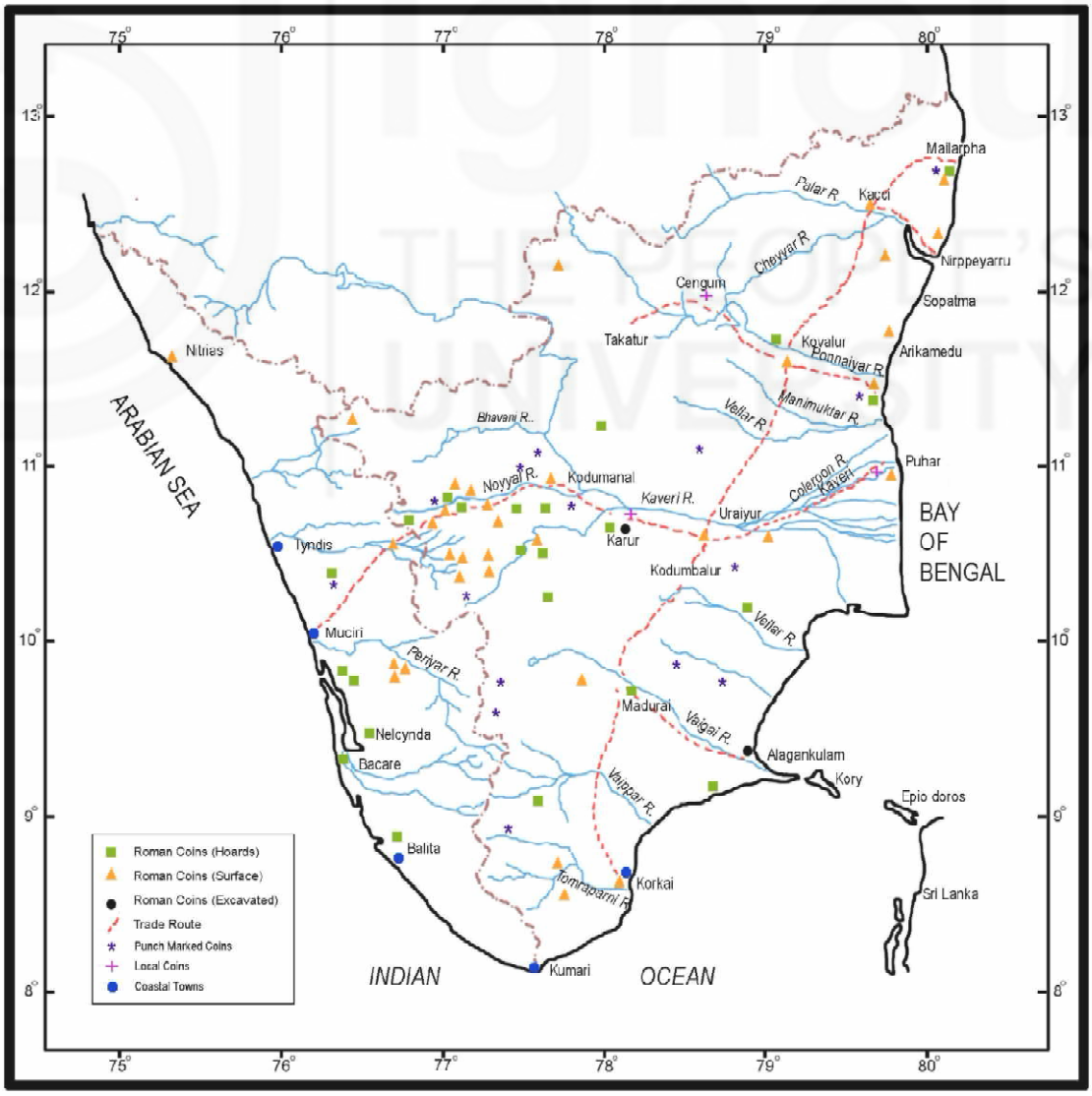
The excavations have yielded a wide variety of coins of all metals, occurring in hoards or in stray pieces. Interestingly hoards of Satavahana coins have been found, where structural remains relating to the period are meager. A few Roman coins have been found as well. Ikshvaku coins are found in large quantity.

The above survey shows that urbanisation in the Deccan was a complex process that varied region wise. External forces like the Mauryan impact may not have been a direct stimulus in the development of urbanness but its presence seen in the form of rock edicts and punch marked coins indicate a penetration of some form of imperial control in already-existing *janapada*-like societies. Punch-marked coins of the Mauryan period have been found in different hoards, dated to 2nd-3rd century CE and also in isolation. It has been surmised that these were used as ritualistic offerings. Most of these were eroded, indicating that they reached south India after prolonged use in the north.

As compared to North India urbanisation in Deccan was a later phenomenon in time. The contrasting processes of emergence of the urbanness have been highlighted above, as well as the distinctive material traits. In North India, even before the Mauryan empire full-fledged urban centres were associated with kingdoms, oligarchies and chiefdoms, the political formation in some *mahajanapadas* conforming to the definition of state. In the Deccan such centres were perhaps associated chiefly with the Satavahana empire, the proto-urban features associated with *janapada* -like localities existing before may not have conformed to a state. In the absence of adequate archaeological data and paucity of textual sources nothing more can be determined.

11.4 THE PROCESSES OF EMERGENCE OF URBANISATION: EARLY TAMILKAM

The identification of Tamilakam or the Tamil country as a distinct cultural region comprising Tamil Nadu and Kerala is chiefly based on a body of texts known as the *Sangam* anthology. These texts which constitute a mine of literature on the conditions of life before and after a few centuries of the Christian era have been worked upon by various scholars. Also important in the identification is a series of 80-90 rock inscriptions found in natural caverns in different parts of Tamil Nadu, meant for the Jain monks, and fragmentary epigraphs in Tamil Brahmi found on potsherds from different parts of South India. Further, references to this region are derived from Asokan edicts, one of which mentions the five independent chieftaincies that presumably existed beyond the southern borders of Asoka's empire: the Choda (Chola), Pandya, Satiyaputra, Keralaputras (Chera) and Tamraparni (Sri Lanka). Outside South Asia the Greaco-Roman writings provide the most detailed account of specific trade centres and ports in peninsular India and their role in the Indian Ocean trading network in the last centuries before and during the early centuries of the Christian era. Many of these were located in Tamilakam. Hoards of Roman coins have been found, their implications will be dealt with later. The veracity of the literary accounts has not been always corroborated archaeologically.



Tamilakam: Early Historical Urban Centres

Map 11.3: Early Historical Urban Centres in Tamilkam [Champakalakshmi, 1996, p. 156]

11.4.1 Pattern of Urbanisation in Early Tamilkam

The Early Historical period in Tamilakam is chronologically dated to 300 BCE to 500CE, which is taken to coincide with the Tamil *Sangam* age. Although extensive portions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been explored and many sites excavated the archaeological record is far from adequate. The sequences or patterns of artifact assemblages are rarely worked out clearly, (the exceptions being a few sites like Arikamedu or Pattanam) that hampers the development of internal relative dating sequences. Documentation of sites has been inconsistent and the nature of archaeological research is often fragmented, delimited by modern state boundaries, thereby making it difficult to understand ancient regional patterns that cross-cut modern political boundaries. Any understanding of the processes of urbanisation needs to keep these limitations in mind. The early historical period witnessed the appearance of an entirely new range of material cultural assemblages at a few sites, while majority of the sites retained their 'megalithic' character. The Megalithic culture, associated with hundreds of burial/commemorative monuments and habitation sites, is characterised by iron implements (mainly weapons of war and a few agricultural implements) and a Black and Red Ware ceramic type. The parameters of urbanisation are reconstructed from the evidence scattered in a number of sites, both inland and coastal which contain architectural features like brick structures, ring wells, pits with drains, and such artefacts as soakage jars, dyeing vats and terracotta ovens. The same craft industries associated with the Late Iron or the Megalithic phase continued in the early Historic period and was perhaps supplemented by other activities like gold working and weaving.

11.4.2 Debates

Historians and archaeologists are divided on the genesis of urbanisation in ancient Tamilakam and debate on whether it was associated with state formation. Champakalakshmi (1996) contends that this was not a result of internal growth, but a 'secondary generation' due to inter-regional trade (with Andhra and Ganga valley) and overseas trade with the Mediterranean region. She believes that there was no state formation in early historical Tamilakam, and society was largely 'tribal' in nature, a point Gurukkal (2010) agrees with. Both believe that relationships of production were kinship-based and the political formations were at the level of chiefdoms. Contrasting opinions are expressed by Morrison (2001) who argues that urbanism in south India had an indigenous growth and Rajan Gurukkal who upholds state formation in the early historical period itself, believing that the foundations were laid much before around 500 BCE. Seneviratne (1989) lays emphasis on the coalescence of internal and external dynamics.

11.4.3 *Tinai*: The Eco Zones

Taking into consideration the very rich data contained in the *Sangam* sources it seems quite likely that there was no state formation during the Early Historical period. The processes of urbanisation during this period need to be situated in the socio-economic milieu of the eco-system called the *tinai* which is chiefly reconstructed from the *Sangam* texts. Society in early Tamilakam was organised on the basis of kinship ties reflected in the distinctive pattern of economic activities in five different eco-zones collectively called the *aintinai,* a dominant theme in the *Sangam* texts. The *tinai* concept points to an understanding of human adaptation to environment. In effect four major forms of production have been identified: animal husbandry, shifting agriculture, petty commodity production and plough agriculture. Forces of change have been recognised only in the riverine wetland/plains or *marutam*, where plough agriculture appeared in the later phases and new agrarian units emerged such as the *brahmana* households/settlements

and warrior settlements. In the *neital* or the coastal zone apart from fishing salt manufacturing and eventually trade became important economic activities. The *tinais* though uneven in their socio-economic contexts, were basically tribal in organisation. Kinship was the basis of production relations and no social division of labour existed even in the *marutam* where the household increasingly organised and controlled production. Social differentiation which is a salient feature of urbanisation did not develop in these zones beyond very broad divisions. Specialised craft production developed such as metal working, weaving and salt manufacturing in response to local exchange as well as inter-regional and long-distance trade. Gifting was the main means of redistribution. The ruling families, identified as those of the Cera-Chola-Pandya, depended for socio-political hegemony on maritime trade that the coastal region or *neital* maintained with distant lands. Institutional forces in urbanisation like the Buddhist monastery, seen in western Deccan, did not develop here as the foci of urban centres.

11.4.4 Exchange

The different levels of exchange mentioned in the *Sangam* texts reflect a barter economy in goods of daily consumption. A review of the location of some of these centres reveals that they are mostly located in the river valleys, along the coast, and very few in the peripheries. Places like Puhar, Madurai and Vanci (Karur) became major commercial centres because of expansion of trade on the eastern coast. Various classes of settlements are mentioned in the Sangam texts, pointing to a settlement hierarchy. A review of the archaeological research however limited shows that not only was there an increase in the number of settlements during this period but also a marked rise in the diversity of material assemblages. Taking these factors into consideration one can perhaps surmise about a population density during this period with occupation developing in the different categories of settlement. The ports and towns that emerged as a result of expanding commerce with the Mediterranean world have been classified under different heads in the Graeco-Roman accounts: as market towns, emporia and inland centres or cities/ towns. The *Sangam* texts refer to a certain degree of intra-*tinai* exchange, the demand for different categories of goods required specialised traders. Different categories of merchants have been mentioned in the *Sangam* texts in which we hear of specialised merchants dealing both in essential commodities like paddy and salt as well in high value or luxury goods in interregional and maritime commerce. The Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions at Manulam and Kodumanal refer to *nigama* or merchant organisations demonstrating the organised nature of merchants. The most prosperous of these merchants moved along major trade routes and made donations of caves to Jain and Buddhist monks. Foreign merchants, referred to as the *yavanas* settled down in some of these commercial centres.

Besides the overseas trade, inter-regional overland exchange with north India and Deccan is likely to have occurred, attested to by the presence of Northern Black Polished ware from Alaganakulam and Korkai, Tamil-Brahmi insciiptions with a mix of Prakrit words, rock shelters with beds dedicated to Jain monks, Mauryan punch marked coins and Red Polished Ware sherds from Arikamedu and Kaveripattinam.

11.4.5 Numismatics

The numismatic evidence presents an interesting picture. Roman and pre-Mauryan punch marked coins have been found mostly in hoards, occurring only in negligible quantity in stratified levels in trade centres and in the Megalithic context. It has been suggested that those occurring in hoards could have been protection money to ensure safe passage of goods or as investments in further trade by foreign merchants. The supporting evidence

is provided by occurrence of counter-marks on some of the coins in hoards. Roman coins may have also been used as gift items in the gift exchange system followed by the Tamil chiefs and the ruling families. It is unlikely that in a barter economy where kin relations were still strong the Roman coins would have functioned as means of payment. It has been suggested that the punch marked coins may have been used as currency as a few of them have been found in worn-out state in stratified levels. Evidence of 'dynastic' coins of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas are also available, though not from a stratified context. Some of these were 'portrait' coins, possibly influenced by the Roman types. However, nothing more definite can be said at this stage, and the relationship between these local issues, Roman coins and the silver punch marked coins cannot be determined.

It is undeniable that maritime trade of this period acted as a stimulus to urbanisation, having an impact in certain zones leading to the emergence of trading centres/ports on the coast, and of consumption points in the inland centres. This may have had an impact on the inter-*tinai* exchange and the plunder mechanism followed by the early ruling polities to obtain resources for exchange and gift. The texts are full of descriptions of regular transactions at these centres. But developments in North India and its increased contacts with early *Tamilakam* also acted as a catalyst, when interaction within the micro-regions and the gradual improvement in technology and greater resource utilisation by this period had already created a network base.

11.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY HISTORICAL URBAN CENTRES: TAMILKAM

One of the principal problems encountered in assessing the urban settlements in early historical *Tamilakam* is that the textual accounts are hardly corroborated by archaeological data. The gap in archaeological research, viz., absence of horizontal excavation and published reports, lack of adequate data on settlement dimensions explains this partially. Only in sites like Arikamedu we get a semblance of the site plan. In this brief survey the archaeological characteristics of the urban centres will be pointed out, region wise. The markers of overseas trade will be discussed simultaneously and new interpretations will be incorporated.

The *Sangam* texts mention dual centres of power for the early kingdoms/chiefdoms, the Cera, Chola and the Pandyas: centres of political and economic activity in the interior and on the coast respectively. We shall see how far this is reflected in the different river valleys.

11.5.1 The Kaveri Valley

According to the *Sangam* texts the dual centres of Chola power—Uraiyur and Kaveripattinam were located in this valley. Karur is considered to be an ancient political centre of the Ceras, while Kodumanal has been mentioned as the famous bead making centre. Uraiyur, at present a part of Tiruchirapalli town was the ancient Chola capital. Descriptions in the texts indicate that it was a strongly defended city, however no such structures have been recovered. The Early Historical period has been identified on the basis of Rouletted ware, Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, Russet coated ware. The earliest levels show Black-and-Red ware pointing to the Megalithic antecedents. Specialised craft products are seen in the presence of beads of glass and semi-precious stones; a brick structure identified as a dyeing vat points to a textile industry. Kaveripattinam, located near the mouth of river Kaveri and identified with Puhar was a port town and commercial capital of the Cholas. Although excavations do not reveal relics of the level of magnitude and grandeur mentioned in the texts certain finds are of significance. A

brick structure, yielding a date of 315 BCE has been identified with a wharf which was meant for anchoring boats. A semi-circular brick structure has been unearthed at Vanagiri, in the vicinity, which may represent a water reservoir. Remains of a Buddhist vihara have been found at a nearby site. At Manigramam deposits of Black-and-Red ware and Rouletted ware have been found in addition to terracotta figurines and coins of the Cholas. The name Manigramam indicates the presence of a merchant quarter, bearing important implications for this coastal town that has been elaborately described in the texts. Karur has been identified with Vanci/Karuvar in which the cultural sequence dates from 2nd century BCE to 14th century CE. The occurrence of several silver coins of the Ceras with portraits and various symbols suggests that this could have been a mint centre. The literary references to Karur as a centre of jewel making are borne out by the finds of rings with intaglios. Apart from the usual ceramic finds of this period, Roman amphorae have been found pointing to overseas trade. No structures have been found in excavations excepting a brick pavement with a drain. The importance of Kodumanal – identified with Kodumanam – located in Coimbatore is for being a bead manufacturing centre. The literary descriptions are matched by the occurrence of beads in various stages of manufacture. The other major industry was of iron, as evidenced by a range of iron weapons, spindles, and the earliest foundry for melting iron ore. Numerous coins of the Cera rulers have been found from the river beds, while the greatest concentration of Roman coins in South India has been found from the near vicinity of the site. Therefore its importance as a commercial centre cannot be doubted. Pottery with Tamil-Brahmi script and graffiti marks complement this. Kodumanal is one of the few centres where links between the Megalithic burial and habitation sites can be clearly established.

11.5.2 The Vaigai River Valley

The Vaigai flows in the southern region of Tamil Nadu where two urban centres are chiefly located viz., Madurai and Alagankulam. Madurai is portrayed as capital city of the Pandyas with markets and fortifications, however, no substantial evidence has been revealed through excavations. Alaganakulam, identified with Saliyur of the *Sangam* works reveals an occupational deposit from 500 BCE to 1200 CE. A port town on the eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, Alaganakulam shows rich material evidence attesting to overseas commerce from the second to the fifth centuries CE, thus occupying an important position along with Puhar, Korkai and Arikamedu in trade with the Mediterranean world. Amphorae sherds have been found along with Rouletted Ware and Late Roman coins of 4th century CE. A Pink ware alternatively described as an African Red Slipped Ware has been found too. Many inscribed potsherds occur as well as pottery with graffiti marks, markers of urban centres of this period. Square copper coins of the Pandyas are the other finds from the site. The finds of Northern Black Polished Ware in the earlier levels point to the importance of this site in the early coastal traffic with Bengal and Andhra coasts. More than two thousand beads of semi- precious stone and shell are found from Period II (300BCE-100 CE) and Period III (100-500CE) with cores, rough-outs and unfinished beads in different stages. This indicates the presence of a bead manufacturing industry.

11.5.3 The Tamraparni Valley

Korkai, located in Tirunelveli district is identified with the port city and secondary capital of the Pandyas. Yielding almost similar assemblage as that seen from the other excavated sites Korkai also draws our attention for the occurrence of pearl oysters found in various levels during excavation, confirming the literary evidence that Korkai was a centre of pearl fishers.

11.5.4 The Palar Basin

Two important early historic settlements have been found here, located in the Chingleput district. Kanchipuram is identified with Kachchi in *Sangam* literature, which was the capital of the Tiraiyars-Tondaiyars. Showing an occupation level from 300 BCE to 4th century CE, Kanchipuram shows similar material assemblage with new elements like Satavahana coins and a coin mould. A brick structure has been unearthed during excavation. Again the literary descriptions of the Kacchi town lack archaeological corroboration. Vasavasamudram, identified with Nirppeyarru, a port city mentioned in the texts is the second settlement excavated in this region, which shows, among other things, evidence of amphorae pointing to overseas commerce.

11.5.5 The Ponnaiyar Basin

Ever since its excavation in the 1940's by the French Archaeological team and later by Mortimer Wheeler Arikamedu came to be regarded as the most important site in India for studying 'Indo-Roman' trade. Located in Pondicherry Union territory, on the banks of the Ariyankuppam river it has been identified with Poduca of the *Periplus* and Virai of the *Sangam* texts. Recent researches by Begley and others have confirmed its importance as a port town where overseas, coastal and inland trade networks appear to have intersected. The prime time for overseas commerce was from the middle of the 1st century BCE to the middle of the 1st century CE. However, it is not known as yet how Arikamedu related to interior settlements. The settlement at Arikamedu grew along the river bank and extended more than 480 m north-south during its peak. Wheeler's excavation had divided the site into Northern and Southern sectors that was retained by Begley. A pre-overseas trade period or a Megalithic level has been marked at the site, the continuity of Megalithic ceramic forms in the overseas trade period shows that the old population group was not wiped out. There is indisputable evidence for the expansion of settlement in the overseas trade period. According to archaeological evidence the Southern sector is regarded as the industrial area and the Northern sector as the port. Brick enclosures excavated in the Southern sector have been identified as tanks, possibly forming part of a textile dyeing complex. Remains of a water reservoir, clusters of small-scale workshops with remains of workings in metal, glass, semi-precious stones, ivory and shell and remains of a shop or storage room with *in situ* conical vessels on the floor give further supportive evidence to the function of the Southern sector. The Northern sector bears unmistakable evidence of port facilities, seen in a 50 m long 'warehouse', fragmentary walls to the south of the 'warehouse', probably functioning as 'quay'. Finds of terra sigillata cups and plates, amphorae, blue glazed faience and glass bowls, gems, Roman clay lamps and Mediterranean clay unguentaria attest to imports in trade. The northernmost part of the northern sector also shows evidence for a living area as seen in the occurrence of storage jars and cooking vessels and some fine table ware. The spatial distribution of amphorae shows its highest concentration in this part implying that the users of the products shipped in amphorae, whether wine, *garum* sauce or olive oil must have lived or dined here. A small-scale industry possible existed in the Northern sector as seen from a foundry and waste pieces.

Exports may have included textiles, shell products and beads of stone and glass, much of which were manufactured at Karaikadu, Kaveripattinam and Alaganakulam on the Coromandel coast and its hinterland, apart from Arikamedu itself. However, the mechanisms of commerce in this sector are still not understood completely. Interconnected with the overseas trade were inland and coastal trade networks. To determine their extent one has to depend on the distribution of fine wares, chiefly the Rouletted Ware. This, mainly seen in certain shapes like dishes has sparked debates on trade mechanisms involving sites on the east coast, Sri Lanka and South east Asia.

Begley argues that Rouletted ware at Arikamedu was regionally manufactured, although the technique of decoration may have been acquired from the classical world. Keeping in mind many unsolved problems associated with the chronology and nature of this luxury item it may be assumed that the pottery or its technology was extensively traded. Stamped bowl is another item that may have featured in this commerce. Certain coarse ware vessels with conical body, jars with perforation or with paddle impressed decoration – all of which have been found in Arikamedu and elsewhere on the Coromandel coast and its hinterland may be considered as markers of some form of exchange. Close examination will reveal whether it was the container, or the commodity or the idea that was traded.

11.5.6 Periyar Basin

According to literary accounts the famous emporium of Muziris was situated in this basin in Kerala on the Malabar coast. Recent excavations in Pattanam assume its identification with Muziris. The Early Historic level (preceded by a phase of Iron age-early Historic transition) shows substantial evidence of overseas trade and intensive occupation at the site. Roman amphorae, fine Rouletted ware, beads of glass and semi-precious stones dominate the cultural assemblage. Intensive building activities are seen in the form of a brick structure, variety of bricks and triple-grooved tiles. Based on the presence of Rouletted Ware, early Roman amphorae, Yemenite 'torpedo' jar fragments, Sigillata, Nabataean and Parthian-early Sassanian pottery this period has been dated to 1st century BCE-5th century CE. Before Pattanam excavations the connections between the Malabar coast and Coromandel were not understood. Pattanam has opened up the possibility of understanding mechanisms of inland commerce between these two coasts. However, for a better knowledge of the urban configuration we have to await the full publication of the excavation results.

Thus, different grades of urban centres existed in *Tamilakam* ranging from port towns, manufacturing centres, political centres and market towns, a centre like Arikamedu combining many of these activities in one place. However, urbanisation in early *Tamilakam* when compared with the North Indian phenomenon was a later development. The North Indian urban centres were larger in dimension, and the material culture was different as well, as seen from above discussion. In *Tamilakam* society was kinship-based, and the structure of the social formation did not reveal any development of caste -hierarchy as in the North. It was in this context that an overseas trade with the Mediterranean world and interregional trade with the Deccan and the Gangetic valley acted as powerful stimuli. A vital difference from the North Indian phenomenon remained in the absence of any state formation.

11.6 SUMMARY

The understanding of early historic period sharply differ for the south and north India; while in north India the period is largely considered BCE 600-300 CE, for south the process began as late as 2nd century BCE. Natural environment and nature of subsistence greatly affected its spatial patterns. There existed varied layers of sub-regional variations and several 'localities'. One also finds direct relationship between the emergence of Buddhist monasteries and the rise of urban centres and market towns. Nagarjunakonda suggests presence of a planned city with fortified citadel area vis-à-vis public buildings and presence of highly specialised craft production. Historians debate whether urbanization was associated with state formation in early historic Tamilkam. Some view that early historic Tamilkam society was largely 'tribal'. They believe that social differentiation, a chief marker of urbanization was hardly developed in the eco-zones (*tinai*). Nonetheless, urban centres were largely located in the river valleys. There

developed extensive commercial activities with the mediteranean world which is reflected in huge availability of Roman coin hoards in the region. Thus the chief stimulus of urbanization in early historic Tamilkam was maritime trade. Tamilkam is also marked by variegated patterns of urban centres – market towns, port towns, manufacturing towns, political centres, etc. However, at Arikamedu one would find diverse activities at one place.

11.7 EXERCISES

1) Elaborate early historic Tamilkam in the context of north and south India. Could the Deccan be viewed as a bridge transmitting the evolved urban forms of north India to the extreme south?
2) Discuss the processes of emergence of urbanisation in the Deccan. Do you agree that southern and eastern Deccan were 'areas of relative isolation'?
3) Critically examine the characteristics of early historic urban centres in the Deccan. Do you agree that 'there was an intimate relationship between the emergence of Buddhist monastic institutions and the rise of market centres and commercial towns'?
4) What are the visible markers of urbanisation in the Deccan? Explain with special reference to Nagarjunakonda.
5) In what ways did Nagarjunakonda differ from other early historic urban centres? Discuss the major finds at Nagarjunakonda.
6) Discuss the nature of the processes of the emergence of urbanisation in early historic Tamilkam. Do you agree that urbanisation in early historic Tamilkam had no association with state formation?
7) What were the characteristics of urban centres in the early historic Tamilkam?
8) What are the major difficulties in identifying the processes of urbanisation in the early historic Tamilkam?

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UNIT 12 URBAN CENTRES AND OTHER TYPES OF SPACES*

Structure

12.1 Intoduction

12.2 Primary Categories of Habitation

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

The onset of urbanism engendered new ideas about the division of space in early India. We shall focus on the texts composed in north India. So, we shall discuss categories that emerged in the Brahmanical and the Buddhist traditions.

Before we examine notions about space in the sixth century BCE, it will be useful to examine the notions of space in the pre-urban world. Our information about the pre urban phase is derived from the Vedic literature. The composers of the Vedas believed that they lived in the *Saptasindhu* (seven rivers) area. However, the idea of seven rivers as a region is not clearly specified. The horizon of the poets of the Vedic age was defined in terms of their proximity to rivers like Saraswati and Sutlej.

12.2 PRIMARY CATEGORIES OF HABITATION

A study of the Vedic literature shows that the primary categories of habitation were defined in terms of contrast between the *grama* (village) and the *aranya* or *vana* (wilderness).

12.2.1 *Grama*

The *Rig Veda* uses the word *grama* to refer to a body of men (*jana*). In fact, a later Vedic text, the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, refers to a leader named Sharyata Manava as roaming with his *grama*. *Grama* referred to a group of *sajata* kinsmen in the *Yajurveda*. It had the connotation of a pastoral group on the move. Sometimes when pastoral groups (*grama*) came together there was *sangrama* (battle), literally coming together of villages. However, even in the time of the *Rig Veda*, the word grama could also refer

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to agricultural settlements. It referred to the inhabited area of the cultured people. Surrounded by ploughed land it contained houses of people. Villages contained cattle, horses, and other domestic animals, as well as men. Grain was also stored in them.There are references to the *vraja* (cattle resort) to which the milk-giving animals go out in the morning from the village (*grama*). Villages were probably open, though perhaps a fort (*pura*) might on occasion be built inside. There are some references to *pura* meaning rampart, fort or stronghold.

Many of Brahmanical rituals of the later Vedic period were followed by war expeditions and raids. These raids were not so much attacks on enemy kingdoms as raids on neighbouring territory. The *Taittiriya Brahmana* mentions how in former times the Kurus and Panchalas went east on raiding expeditions during the *Rajasuya* sacrifice. It was a time when there were only a few settled agricultural communities, and those too had restricted resources. So, an alternation with raiding and transhumance would help increase the resources of the leaders of the community. At this point the dominant meaning of the word *grama* seems to have been spaces and communities who combined agriculture and transhumance.

12.2.2 *The Aranya*

Whoever stays in the forest at evening imagines
Someone is calling his cow; someone else is cutting wood ;
Someone is crying out.
…Mother of wild beasts, untilled by a plough but full of food,
Sweet-smelling of perfume and balm
To her, the spirit of the forest, I offer my praise.

Rig Veda: hymn in praise of *Aranyani*

The words *aranya* and *vana* did not necessarily refer to forest. It has been translated as wilderness. In many instances the *aranya* referred to uncultivated land. Animals and plants of the village were contrasted with those that lived in forest or grew wild in the woods. The *aranya* had a negative connotation in the minds of the composers of the Vedic texts. This alien outside sphere was inhabited by communities of the *yakshas, rakshasas, vanaras* and countless other groups that were feared and looked down upon. It was the abode of thieves. In the *Sama Veda*, the *aranya* is more generally opposed to the abode of civilized men (*kavayah*, 'sages' as opposed to *vanargavah*, 'savages'). Dead were carried to the *aranya* to be buried. Hermits too lived there. There was a saying 'In the *grama*, one undertakes the consecration, in the *aranya* one sacrifices.'

In the later Vedic period there are references to *jana-pada* roughly translated as 'the place where people placed their feet'. The *janapada* in the Brahmana literature signified both the 'people', as opposed to the king and the 'land' or realm.

12.3 NOTIONS OF SPACE AFTER THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN CENTRES

With the emergence of urban centres in the sixth century BCE new categories in the classification of space emerged.Texts that were composed in this world of cities have several new features.They point to the presence of a variety of settlements like villages, cities, *janapadas* and *mahajanapadas*. These settlements were considered part of a hierarchically organised world. Some units of settlement were considered superior to others. This statement from the *Mahaparinibbana-sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* gives us a clear idea of the notions of hierarchy of settlements. While the Buddha lay dying in Kusinara, Ananda, the favourite disciple of the Buddha, requested him to take his *parinirvana* in a city which would correspond to his exalted status:

Let not the Exalted One die in this little wattle-and-daub town, in this town in the midst of the jungle, in this branch township. For, Lord, there are other great cities such as Champa, Rajagaha, Savatthi, Saketa, Kosambi and Benaras. Let the Exalted One die in one of them. Where there are many wealthy nobles and Brahmins and heads of houses, believers in the Tathagata, who will pay due honours to the remains of the Tathagata.

Settlements like villages, cities, *janapadas* and *mahajanapadas* were parts of a larger entity variously called 'Jambudvipa' (Jambudipa) or 'Aryavarta'. For example the *Cakkavattisihanadasuttanta* of the *Dighanikaya* says:

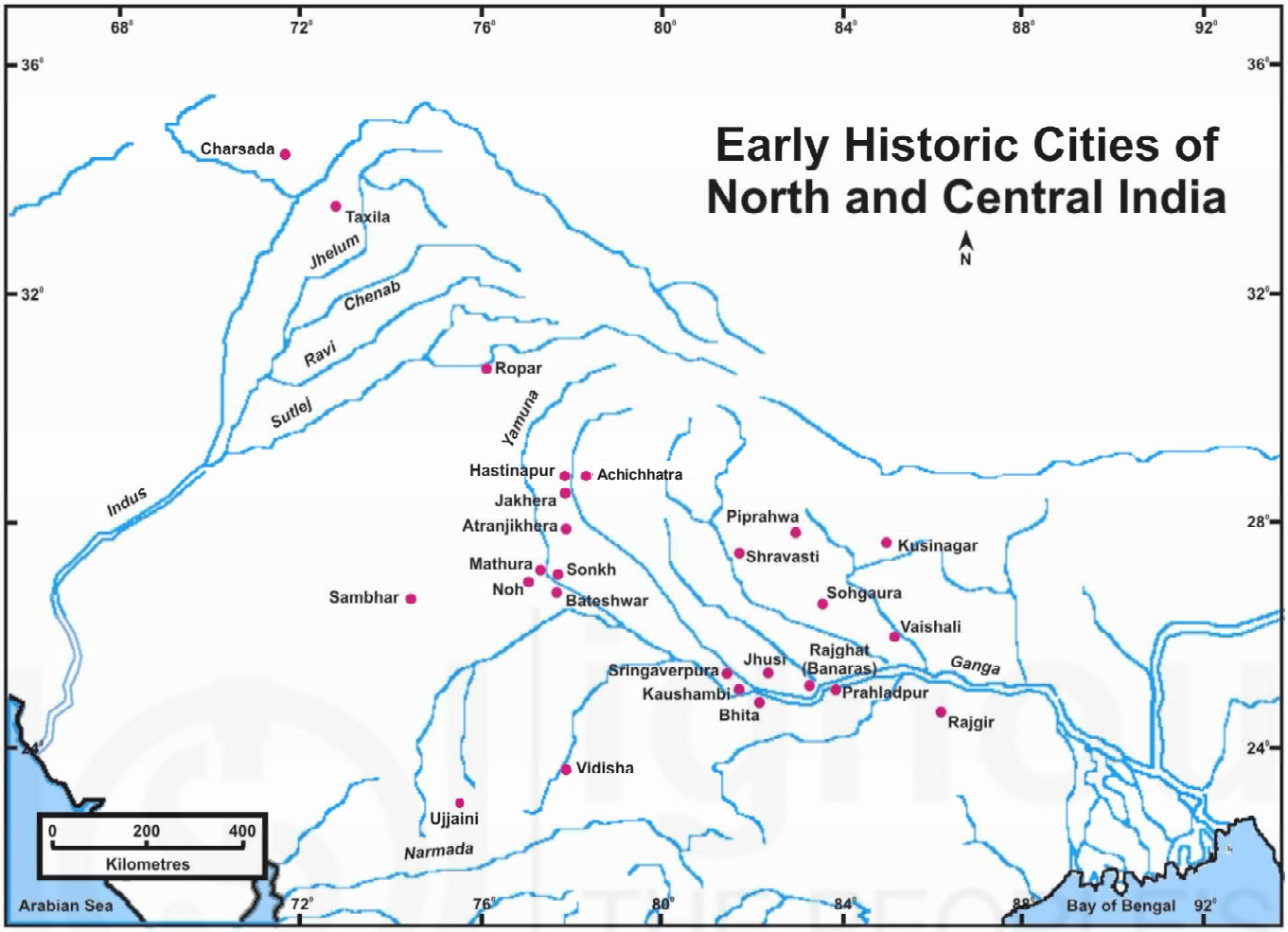
Jambudipa will be mighty and prosperous, the villages, towns and royal cities will be so close that a cock could fly from each one to the next. This Jambudipa will be pervaded by mankind even as a jungle is by reeds and rushes. In this Continent of India there will be 84000 towns with Ketumati (Benaras), the royal city, at their head.

According to the *Anguttara Nikaya* Jambudipa had pleasant parks, pleasant groves, grounds and lakes. It also contained steep precipitous cliffs, impassable rivers, inaccessible mountains and dense jungles. These references indicate that Jambudvipa consisted of a variety of settlements.

The Brahman tradition too mentions units like the Bharatavarsha and Aryavarta. The boundaries of these entities vary in different sources. However, it is clear that the composers of texts were visualizing a region that was larger than the *mahajanapadas*. Panini, a grammarian who lived in the sixth-fifth century BCE, envisages a linguistic unit that was larger than the *mahajanapadas*. He used categories like '*Udichya*' and '*Prachya*' to denote areas following varying traditions of Sanskrit speech. '*Udichya*' and '*Prachya*' were further sub-divided into areas like Kapishi, Gandhara, Koshala, Kashi, Magadha and many other territories. Similarly, notions like *dakshinapatha* and *uttarapatha* also emerged in this period. Such an idea of space that divided Jambudvipa into territories of east-west and north-south were premised upon an idea of a middle territory. That is why the literature of the sixth-fifth century BCE refers to the '*madhyadesha*' (middle country).

12.3.1 The Middle Country

Located in the larger world of the Jambudvipa or Aryavarta was a unit of settlement called the 'Middle Country' (*madhyadesha*). *Madhyadesha* was the place where the conduct of people was in accordance with *dharma*. It was the place where people spoke the chaste language. Its towns and villages are described in glowing terms. The Brahmanical and Buddhist texts exhort people to follow the cultural practices of the people of the 'middle country'. The Buddha lived and preached in the *majjhimadesa (madhyadesha)*. What is interesting however is that the boundaries of *madhyadesha* as mentioned in the Brahmana literature do not match those of the Buddhist literature. The *Dharmasutra* of Baudhayana describes it as lying to the east of the area where the river Saraswati disappears, to the west of the Kalakavana (Black forest), a forest near Allahabad, to the north of the Paripatra (the Satpuras ranges in Madhya Pradesh) and south of the Himalayas. This notion of the *madhyadesha* is found in the *Manusmriti* too. Many of the *Puranas* believed to have been written around the fifth-sixth centuries follow the division of space defined by the *Dharmashastra* literature. This definition of the *madhyadesha* excluded areas east of Allahabad from its ambit. This would mean that Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar or Bengal were not considered part of the *madhyadesha*. Thus, cities like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Vaishali or Pataliputra were believed to be located beyond the *madhyadesha*. The Buddha spent his life preaching in areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The four places of pilgrimage in the Buddhist tradition – Kapilavastu, Bodh Gaya, Saranath and Kusinagara, were in areas that were considered impure lands in the Brahmana tradition.



Map 12.1: Early Historic Cities of North and Central India [After Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, Map 6.2, p. 280.]

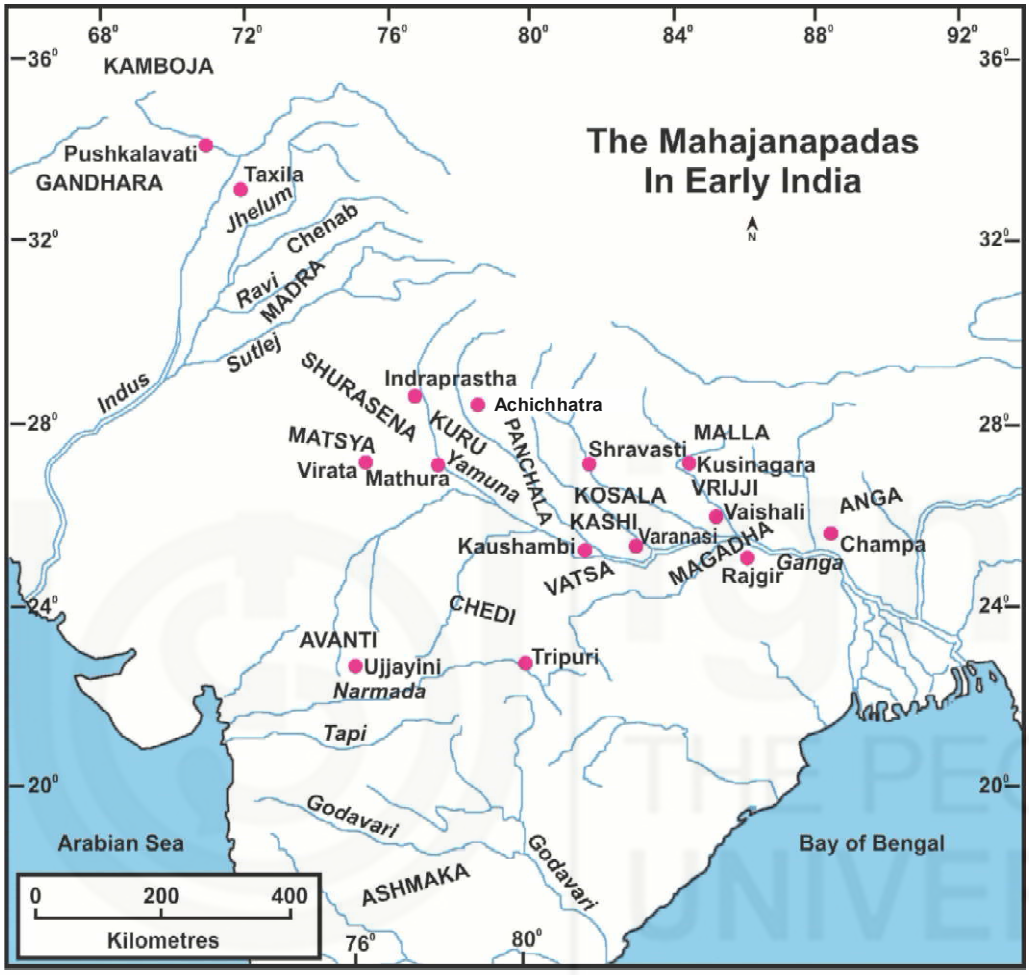
The *majjhimadesa (madhyadesha)* of the Buddhist texts includes areas that were closely linked to the life of the Buddha. In the *Mahavagga* the eastern boundary of *madhyadesha* is said to have extended upto the town of Kajangala (near Bhagalpur, Bihar). The *mahajanapadas* of Kasi, Kosala, Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Chetiya and Vatsa, areas beyond the boundaries of the Brahmanical *madhyadesha*, were part of the Buddhist conception of the *madhyadesha*. The *madhyadesha* was the cultural unit that was the focus of attention for the writers after the sixth century BCE. It was the larger world in which most of the *mahajanapadas* were located. The writers saw a unity in this large geographical unit. They perceived some form of connectedness that underlay the individual histories of different regions. Texts repeatedly mention movement of merchants, warriors and preachers from one city to another. This suggests a situation of contact and communication.

12.3.2 The *Mahajanapada*

The Buddhist literature repeatedly refers to a unit of settlement called the *mahajanapada*. Kings of some of the *janapadas* conquered the territories of neighbouring communities and kingdoms. Their large size and the presence of cities in the *mahajanapadas* distinguished them from the *janapadas* of the earlier period. The Buddhist literature refers to sixteen *mahajanapadas* spread over the Jambudipa. The famous *mahajanapadas* were those of Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vajji, Vatsa and Avanti. Each of them were ruled from a political centre inhabited by kings, officials, traders and crafts persons.

Boundaries of the *mahajanapadas* cannot be carefully worked out. They were frontiers created by rivers, hills, jungles and unconquered communities. These large untamed spaces separated the *mahajanapadas* from each other.

Within the world of *mahajanapadas* were located cities, towns, villages, forests and the entire panoply of the Indian civilisation. The capital of Kosala was Sravasti. Kosala, probably the most important *mahajanapada* in the time of the Buddha contained many other cities like Saketa, Ayodhya, Setavya and Ukkattha.



Map 12.2: The *Mahajanapadas* [After Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, Map 6.1, p. 263.]

12.3.3 The *Janapada*

The *janapada* as a unit of settlement is mentioned in the later Vedic literature. It emerged in a phase of history when cities had not come into existence. *Janapadas* consisted of many villages of agriculturists and pastoral nomads. Large parts of *janapadas* were covered by forests, since foraging was an important activity of the people. In the early phase many of the *janapadas* were ruled by Kshatriya lineages. That is why they were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages like Kuru, Panchala, Kekeya, Madra and Matsya. Explaining a grammatical rule Patanjali says that subordinate groups of the *janapadas* are not included in naming the *janapadas*. This is a reflection of the fact that the *janapadas* were homes to a variety of groups that had been subordinated by the dominant groups. These names of *janapadas* continued to be used even after the dominant Kshatriya groups were conquered by other kings and rulers. Many *janapadas* like those of Magadha, Vajji (Vaishali) or Avanti were not named after Kshatriya lineages. Dominant groups in these *janapadas* had different origins. Texts like the *Dighanikaya* dated to the subsequent period mention the presence of villages, market towns and cities in the *janapadas*.

The *Arthashastra* defines *janapada* as the territory that is agriculturally fertile, with mines, forests and pastures, with dedicated farmers who with the traders are capable of bearing the burden of taxes. Texts of the later period use the word *janapada* and *mahajanapada* interchangeably. Within the *janapada* were to be found different kinds of settlements. For example Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* says that *grama, ghosha, nagara* and *samvaha* were units of settlement inside the *janapadas*.

12.3.4 The City

Cities emerged as the most celebrated and visible forms of settlement in the sixth century BCE. The Brahman Dharmashastra texts asked pious people to avoid visiting cities because of the dust and perpetual non recital of the Vedas. The Buddha on the other hand spent most of his time in cities. Buddhism has been called a response to urban misery. Cities were praised or censored by different traditions but nobody could be indifferent to them. Cities like Taxila, Pataliputra, Rajagriha, Shravasti, Kashi, Kaushambi and Ujjain dominate the landscape of the sixth-third century BCE. Different expressions are used for urban centres. The most popular words are *pura, puri*, *nagara* and *mahanagara*. Other words like *pattana, putabhedana, sthaniya* and *nigama* are also used. This kind of variety of words shows variations in space and time to denote this new kind of settlement. Some of these words also referred to the size and primary activity of a settlement.

In the Vedic literature the word *pura* meant a 'fort' or a 'stronghold' but did not have any relationship to a city. Such centres might have denoted the headquarters of Kshatriya lineages. For example Hastinapura was the centre of the Kuru *janapada*. In the sixth century BCE its connotation as a defensive stronghold fell in disuse and it simply meant an urban centre.

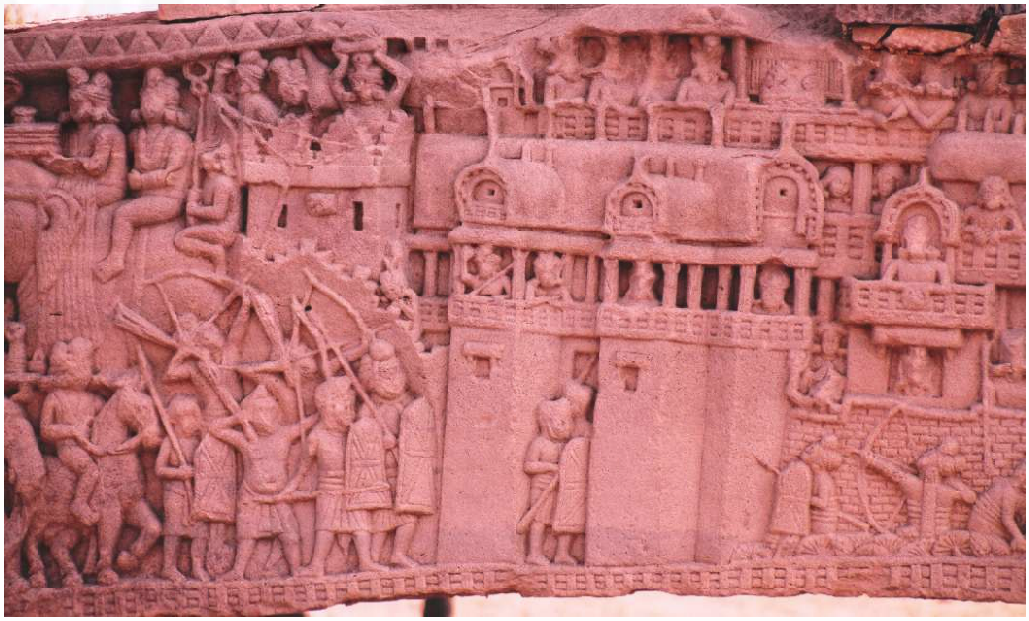


Figure 12.1: A City under Seize, Photograph from Sanchi , M.P.

Nagara is the word used most commonly for a city in the Sanskrit and Pali literature. The word *pattana* is used by writers like Kalidasa to denote a city particularly one of commercial character. The literal meaning of the word *sthaniya* is 'a place to stay at'. The *Arthashastra* says that a *sthaniya* should be located at the centre of eight hundred villages and could sometimes serve as the capital.

The word *puta-bhedana* has been used for Pataliputara in the *Mahaparinirvanasutta*. It referred to 'the distribution centre of parcels of merchandise of many kinds'. This was a new kind of settlement where the focus was not on cultivation or manufacture. It was simply acting as a centre where merchant goods arrived from different quarters to

be re- packaged for distribution in smaller centres. Such a specialized activity was possible only in the context of the emergence of trade networks. The word *nigama* referred to a market town. That is why in the Sanskrit language the word '*naigama*' means a 'merchant'.

The *Arthashastra* mentions other categories of settlements too. The *dronamukha* was to be located at the centre of four hundred villages, the *kharvatika* of two hundred villages and the *samgrahana* of ten villages. These seem to be units co-ordinating the functions of many villages. The *Arthashastra* also refers to the *durga*. *Durga* is usually translated as a fort. However, the *Arthashastra* description indicates that it was the royal city. The king's palace was meant to be located in its centre. Roads connected it with areas inhabited by Brahmanas, merchants and workers. The *Manusmriti* speaks of *durgas* that could be located in waters, deserts, forests and hills. The king was to establish his citadel (*pura*) in such a *durga*. It was to be replenished with weapons, wealth, food, water and vehicles. References to these units of settlement in other literary sources indicate that a variety of settlements had emerged with the coming of the city.

Names of many cities suggest a new attitude to space. The Buddhist text *Papanca-sudani* explains the meaning of the word Shravasti (Savathi; *sabbamatthi* – where everything is available). The Buddhist literature abounds in details about the wealth and prosperity of Savatthi. Buddha gave the largest number of sermons in Savatthi. Anathapindika, the merchant who bought the Jetavana for the construction of a *vihara* was a resident of Savatthi. So was Visakha Migarmata who gave liberal donations to the Buddhist *samgha*. Girivraja (pasture surrounded by hills), the capital of Magadha was renamed Rajagriha (home of the king). Ujjaiyini the capital of Avanti in Madhya Pradesh meant 'the victorious one' Ayodhya meant 'unconquerable'. These names can be understood in the context of the emergence of powerful kingdoms and prosperous cities.

Urban centres were believed to be large settlements. For example the city of Kashi was said to have spread over an area of 12 *yojanas* according to a *Jataka* story. The city of Mithila and Indapatta covered seven y*ojanas*. A Buddhist text says that Vaishali the capital of the Vajji confederacy had 7707 storied buildings, 7707 pinnacled buildings, 7707 *aramas,* 7707 lotus ponds. All these statements about the size of settlements might be exaggerations as archaeological evidences do not support them. However, they display an awareness about cities as built spaces that covered larger areas than villages.

Merchants travelling from Anga to Sindhu-Sauviradesha (both sides of the lower Indus) are mentioned in the Buddhist texts. The *Jataka* stories provide graphic descriptions of contact and communication among communities. Boat rides, cart rides, endless journeys on foot, battles, marriages and a thousand other forms of contact among the people of the *mahajanapadas*. Banaras, Savatthi and Taxila were connected not only by networks of trade but also by exchange of knowledge. There are repeated references to Buddha's physician Jivaka who travelled from Rajagriha to Taxila to learn medication. The *Susima Jataka* tells us about a youth who travelled from Benaras to Taxila to learn the '*hatthisutta*'. Similarly, the famous story of the disciples of Bavari who travelled from the banks of the Godavari in the *dakkhinapatha* to Pratishthana, Ujjain, Vidisha and Shravasti conveys an image of connectedness. The ceaseless wanderings of the Buddha and his injunctions to the monks that they should lead a peripatetic life is in tune with the new world that had emerged where people could turn full time travellers.

12.4 SPACES AROUND THE CITY

City as a delimited zone meant that there was a concern for what existed outside the high walls of the city. Several terms like *nagara-bahya* (outside the city), *puropakantha* (near the city) and *nagaropanta* (near the border of the city) are used in early historic

texts. Cremation grounds were located outside the city. Normative texts insist that cremation grounds must be located outside the city. They were also used for the execution of convicts. The Arthashastra says that *Chandalas* and heretics were to stay near the cremation ground. Fa Xian and Xuan Zang noticed the fact that *Chandalas* lived outside the city near cremation grounds. The location of *Chandalas* on the periphery of cities was the result of a set of decisions taken by the ruling minority located in the city. It was a deliberate location, or relocation within a space defined by the powerful. It was not as if there was a shortage of space in the city; rather, the presence of a certain number of people (outcastes) outside the boundaries of the city reflects the spatial projection of control exercised by the powerful. Our assertion is supported by the *Jataka* story that mentions how the king of Vedeha in anticipation of an invasion

> *...removed outside, all the poor people who lived in the city, and he brought from all the kingdom, the countryside, and the suburb villages, and settled within the city the rich families of the powerful* (*Jataka* No. 546).

There are references to outcaste-prostitutes living outside the city. Buddhism and Jainism had a long tradition of establishing *viharas* outside the city. References in literary works like the *Mricchakatika* show that *viharas* were located beyond the boundaries of the city. Many establishments of the brahmana tradition too were located beyond the city walls. In the subsequent period many temples were located outside the city. Individual ascetics had their *ashramas* outside the city. In fact the *Arthashastra* lays down a rule saying that places of worship and pilgrimage shall be constructed at a certain distance from the city. Denizens might have left the city but the city had not left them. Their social world was intimately connected with the happenings in the city. The process of urbanisation seems to witness an increase in the number of untouchable caste groups. Monks and ascetics depended on the patronage of the urbanites for their survival.

The urban periphery had another function. It was the space for pleasure gardens. Rivers and streams were the sites of secret rendezvous. Artificially created groves and gardens like *udyana, upavana* and *pura-kanana* were spots of leisure and sports for the urban rich. They could be ornamented with seats, pavilions, artificial hillocks, and artificial tanks.

The emergence of urbanism had not only transformed the physical space inside the city, it had modified the space in the surrounding areas too. This process of change is reflected in the social space too. Kings, merchants and priests were products of the same process as the untouchable castes. Beyond the penumbra of the city were located villages of different kinds. They escaped modifications in physical shape, but they too were caught in the web of urbanism.

12.4.1 The Village

The word *grama* is frequently used to describe villages. It was used in the earlier period too. However, by the third second century BCE its meaning was fixed to denote agricultural settlements. Literature refers to a variety of villages. In the *Jataka* literature there are references to villages of carpenters, weavers, smiths, potters, hunters, thieves, brahmanas and outcaste *Chandalas*.

Villages consisted of households of agriculturists. The *Jatakas* refer to villages having thirty to a thousand households. The *Vinaya-Pitaka* says that a village could consist of one or two hutments too. The *Arthashastra* is concerned with production and its appropriation by the king. While it tends to treat producers as an organised whole, it does not gloss over differences among communities. It says that dancers, performers and musicians should not be allowed entry into villages lest they disturb the rural folk who are helpless and should be busy in the fields. For the first time, rural folk are mentioned as helpless and gullible.

Figure 12.2: Uruvela Village (Bodhgaya), Photograph from Sanchi, M.P.

The word *grama* increasingly meant peasant villages. By the third-fourth century peasant villages were further classified into *brahmadeya*, *agrahara* or *mangalam* villages. These words signified different patterns of control in these villages. These were villages where agriculture was the primary activity and a part of the produce was taken away by the king. However, there were other kinds of *gramas* too. In the *Jataka* literature there are references to *pratyantagama*. There are also references to *palli* – a term used to denote a small tribal or pastoral village.

12.4.2 *Ghosha*

Villages of pastoralist are also mentioned as *ghosha*. For example the playwright Bhasa in his *Balacharita* describes Vasudeva's journey with baby Krishna from Mathura to Vrindavana. When he exited through the gateway of Mathura and crossed the river Yamuna he could hear mooing of the cows. The mooing indicated that a *ghosha* was close by. It consisted of a number of huts. Compared to the statist brahmana society the cultural traditions and practices of the pastoral nomadic communities were far more open in terms of equality of status and practices of marriage and kinship.

12.4.3 Forest

The *Arthashastra* suggests that agricultural land was surrounded by pastures which in turn was surrounded by wilderness (*aranya*) inhabited by ascetics. Wilderness was surrounded by different kinds of forests (*vana)*. These forests were also classified in terms of the kind of animals and human communities that lived there. The *Arthashastra's* contrast between the *aranya* and the *vana* is significant. *Aranya* referred to the land beyond the pastures inhabited by ascetics. This would have ensured regular contact between the communities of the agriculturists and brahmana – *shramana* groups that resided in the *aranya*. The *vana* on the other hand was the area beyond wilderness. There were forests that had been tamed for the requirements of the king and there were

untamed forests inhabited by elephants and wild animals. This was the landscape peopled by trappers, *Shabaras, Pulindas, Chandalas* and other forest-dwellers. The eye of power scanned areas beyond the town, the country and the wilderness. It began to assimilate communities of foragers. This signalled the gradual conquest of the jungle. With active encouragement from state administration agriculturists nibbled at other kinds of settlements. *Shreni* groups, chiefs and peasants tried to extend cultivation in the areas of surrounding pastoral nomadic communities. While agriculturists were nibbling at the space belonging to pastures, shepherds were entering the less densely forested wilderness (*aranya*) surrounding the pastures.

Figure 12.3: Prince Vessantara in Forest (1) Photograph from Sanchi, M.P.

Figure 12.4: Prince Vessantara in Forest (2) Photograph from Sanchi , M.P.

The *grama* and the *aranya* were not simply opposite poles of habitation pattern, they complemented each other too. Agriculturists needed the forest for grazing ground, as a source of new land, manpower and forest products. The forest also acted as a link between settled areas and as a refuge for rebels and recluses. For the inhabitants of forests, agricultural communities were a source of agricultural products, cattle and employment as agricultural labour and/or in a military capacity. Thus, for the people of the *grama*, the forest was not only the abode of the *rakshasas*, it was also a place to be conquered.

Forest as a unit of space was ever present in the consciousness of the early Indians. In the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and many other works of literature, the city and the forest represent frame of exile and kingdom. Forest has two contrasting images. It was the home of *Kiratas*, *Shabaras*, *Vaghurikas* and many forest groups. They used to loot and maraud adjoining villages. In the Buddhist canons there are provisions for suspension of religious performances in case of attacks by forest tribes. Asoka Maurya warned the forest communities to desist from marauding his kingdom. Forest was present in the consciousness of people also because urban centres were hubs of long distance trade. Traders had to pass through forested regions in their long journeys.

The *Jataka* texts contain many stories of these encounters. Forest was believed to be the abode of *rakshashas*, *yakshas* and a variety of ghouls and demons. In texts like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* the *rakshashas* are to be found everywhere and they move at will. It indicates a time when forests were not very far away from cities and villages. The characterisation of the *rakshashas* also indicates that they were not subject to state structure. The more fluid social organisation found in foraging societies seems to inform their social organisation. Forest was the zone that was beyond the control of cities. However, texts like the *Arthashastra* show an attempt to bring it within the ambit of king's power. The other image of the forest was that it was the home of ascetics in the brahmana and Buddhist traditions. As such forest was the home of spirituality and other worldliness.

12.5 SUMMARY

The study of urban centres and other types of spaces reveals important facets of history. In the pre-urban phase the differentiation was primarily between the *grama* and *aranya*. After the sixth century BCE city emerged as a new form of settlement. Literature of this period refers to a variety of forests, villages and cities. The differentiation among settlements was a result of human action. This is obvious from the descriptions of people who were forced to live outside the city.

12.6 EXERCISES

1) What was the perception of the forest in the early Indian literature?
2) How were the villages of the sixth century BCE different from those of the earlier period?
3) Describe the relationship between the forest and the village.
4) Describe the units of settlement in the period before the onset of urbanism.
5) What were the differences between the *janapadas* of the pre-urban phase and the *mahajanapadas*?
6) Discuss the significance of the differences in the meanings of terms used for denoting cities.

7) What is the significance of the presence of categories like *nagarabahya, puropakantha, nagaropanta* in the early Indian texts?

8) What were the differences between cities and villages according to the early Indian texts?

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UNIT 13 CITIES IN TEXTS*

Structure

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Representation of Cities in the *Arthashastra*

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

The city in ancient Indian literature has been treated in many different ways. This is because there are many different kinds of literature and every literary kind depicts the city according to its special perspective. In fact even within one type of literature, two texts may have completely different views on the city. Thus if we broadly speak of normative and narrative literature, the former tends to have a theoretical/prescriptive take while the latter has a descriptive approach. However, within normative literature, the *Arthashastra*, the *Dharmasutra*s, and the *Kamasutra*, have their own separate versions of early urbanism: king-centric, dharma-centric, and eros-centric, respectively. Similarly among narrative texts, the *Ramayana* may present a moralistic description of the city while the *Padataditaka* may a licentious one.

In this Unit, let us sample how some major texts from across ancient India, in different languages, with different points of view, represented the city. Bear in mind that texts do not merely reflect historical reality; they could also refract it or bend it and reshape it to achieve a particular effect or purpose. As A.K. Ramanujan, the great poet and literary critic put it, we need to be sensitive to the 'specific density' and 'refractive index' of literature as a medium. (Ramanujan, 1999:52)

Once we do that, texts open up a rich repertoire of insights on the ancient Indian city. They tell us not only about its physical structure and layout but about the 'citi-ness' of the city beyond its physical contours. (Chattopadhyaya, 2003: 106)

Texts help us construct a cultural history of urbanism, among other things: They can help us understand what it was like to be a city-dweller in ancient times and what mentalities, ideologies, institutions and behavior characterised the city. This Unit shall emphasise this aspect of literary representations of the city, based chiefly on narrative literature.

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13.2 REPRESENTATION OF CITIES IN THE *ARTHASHASTRA*

References to cities abound in early Indian texts from about the fifth/fourth century BCE onwards. Among the earliest Sanskrit texts in which we find a systematic account of the city is Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which was probably composed between 4th century BCE and 3rd century CE; thus a part of its composition coincided with the Mauryan empire.

13.2.1 The Capital Town

The *Arthashastra* has a chapter on the planning and construction of a city, called *Durganivesha*.[1] '*Durga*' implies a fortified, highly protected settlement, which in this chapter was the seat of the king as well as a flourishing urban centre. Since the *Arthashastra* is essentially a treatise on statecraft advising a king on how best to organise his kingdom and its affairs, the layout of the capital city according to this text is centred on the king's palace and its security. Thus the different sections of the city, where commercial, ritual, residential, artisanal, administrative and other functions were carried out, were located by the text in relation to the location of the royal residence (*rajanivesha*). So in the north-east of the *rajanivesha* was to be situated the section of the priest, places for sacrifice, water, and the councillors of state (*amatya*); to the south-east were to be the kitchen and the elephant stable, and beyond these the place for dealers in perfumes, flowers, liquids and makers of toiletries; to the east were the *kshatriya*s; in the southern quarter of the eastern direction were to be located the storehouse for goods, the records and audit office and the workmen's quarters. To the west was the armoury and beyond that space allocated to grain dealers of the city, workshop officials, army officers, dancers and courtesans. The *vaishya*s were to live in the southern direction, the *shudra*s in the western. The *brahmana*s were assigned the northern part together with the deities of the city.

While the four *varna*s are assigned their respective residential areas in different cardinal directions, these were clearly not mutually exclusive zones, as B.D. Chattopadhyaya has pointed out. This is because work and functional requirements would necessarily involve considerable interaction across all segments of space for all groups of people. So in this case, caste segregation appears as something of a theoretical rather than practical principle. The point was to underline the material and ideological centrality of the king to all social and economic affairs of the realm. For the same reason, his palace was to be built on a site said to be fit for all four *varna*s to live on (*chaturvarnya samajive*). Homes of outcastes like the *chandala*s were never to be within the settlement but always outside it. Here again, however, we know from other texts like the *Mrcchakatikam,* that *chandala*s in their role as executioners on duty could enter and negotiate their way through the city.

[1] The following discussion of the *Arthashastra* evidence is based on B.D. Chattopadhyaya's (2003) analysis. See footnote 2.

LAYOUT OF THE FORTIFIED CITY (*DURGANIVESA*)

1. Three royal highways running west to east and three running south to north, that should be the division of the residential area.
2. It should have twelve gates (and be provided) with suitable (places for) water, drains and underground passages.
3. Roads should be of a width of four dandas.
4. The royal highway and roads in a dronamukha, a sthaniya, the countryside and pasture-lands as well as paths in a harbor town, a battle array, a cremation ground and a village (should be) eight dandas (in width).
5. Paths on irrigation works and in forests four dandas, paths for elephants and along fields two dandas, five aratn is the chariot path, four the cattle-path (and) two the path for small animals and men.
6. On an excellent building site, fit for the four varnas to live on, the royal residence (should be erected).
7. In the ninth part to the north of the heart of the residential area he should cause the royal palace to be built in accordance with the procedure laid down, facing the east or the north.
8. The residence of the preceptor and the chaplain, the places for sacrifices and for water as well as councilors should occupy its north-by-east part, the kitchen, the elephant stables and the magazine the south-by-east part.
9. Beyond that, dealers in perfumes, flowers and liquids, makers of articles of toilet and Ksatriyas should live in the eastern quarter.
10. The store-house for goods, the records and audit office, and work-men's quarters (should occupy) the east-by-south part, the storehouse for forest produce and the armoury the west-by-south part.
11. Beyond that, grain dealers of the city, factory officers and army officers, dealers in cooked food, wine and meat, courtesans, dancers and Vaisyas should live in the southern quarter.
12. Stables for donkeys and camels and the workshop (should occupy) the south-by-west part, stables for carriages and chariots the noth-by-west part.
13. Beyond that, workers in wool, yarn, bamboo, leather, armours, weapons and shields, and Sudras should live in the western quarter.
14. The rooms for wares and medicines (should occupy) the west-by-north part, the treasury and cattle and horse the east-by-north part.
15. Beyond that, the tutelary deities of the city and the king, and workers in metals and jewels and Brahmins should live in the northern quarter.
16. In enclosures in the non-residential areas, quarters for guilds and foreign merchants should be situated.
17. He should cause to be built in the centre of the city shrines for Aparajita, Apratihata, Jayanta and Vijayanta as well as temples of Siva, Vaisravana, Asvins, Sri and Madira.
18. He should install the presiding deities of the dwelling places according to their respective regions.
19. The city gates (should be) presided over by Brahman, Indra, Yama and Senapati.
20. Outside (the city), at a distance of one hundred dhanuses from the moat, should be made sanctuaries, holy places, groves and water works, and the deities of the quarters in the respective quarters.
21. The northern or the eastern part of the cremation ground should be for the best among the varnas, to the south the cremation ground for the lower varnas.
22. For transgression of that, the lowest fine for violence (shall be imposed).
23. The quarters for heretics and Candalas (should be) on the outskirts of the cremation ground.
24. He should fix boundaries for householders in accordance with areas (necessary) for their workshops.
25. In them they should make, with permission, flower gardens and fruit-orchards, as well as stores of grains and commodities.
26. An enclosure for a group of ten families should be a place for a well (for them).
27. He should cause to be made stores, capable of being used over a number of years, of all kinds of fats, grains, sugar, salts, perfumes, medicines, dried vegetables, fodder, dried meat, hay, wood, metals, hides, charcoal, tendons, poisons, horns, bamboos, barks, strong timber, weapons, shields and stones.
28. He should cause the old to be constantly replaced by new.
29. He should station (a force consisting of) elephants, horses, chariots and infantry-men, under more than one chief.
30. For, a (force) under more than one chief does not fall a prey to enemy instigations, through mutual fear.
31. By this is explained the making of frontier forts.
32. And he should not allow in the city 'outsiders' who cause harm to the country. He should cast them out in the countryside or make them pay all the taxes.

***The Kautilya Arthasastra*, R.P., Kangle (tr.), Part II, Bombay: Bombay University Press, Second Edition, 1972, Chapter Four, Section 22, pp. 67-71.**

The other dominant concern of the *Arthashastra* when dealing with the *durga* is ensuring its security. For this ramparts (*vapra*) and moats (*parikha*) were to be built encircling the city. The fortification wall is in fact an architectural hallmark of an urban settlement. Moreover, the *Arthashastra* prescribes that such outsiders (*baharika*s) as could cause harm to the state or disrupt the peace were to be jettisoned beyond city limits. Clearly the state (*rashtra*) was seen to be vested in the capital city.

13.2.2 *Nigama*, *Nagara*, and *Mahanagaras*

Not only was the capital important, urban centres (*nagara*) generally occupied the higher end of what seems to have been a graded hierarchy of human settlements, from the rural to the urban, in ancient India. We know this from early Pali texts (4^{th} -2^{nd} century BCE) which speak of *gama-nigama-nagara* (village-town-city) in one breath. It is from the Pali *Digha Nikaya* (part of the *Sutta Pitaka*) that we also hear of *mahanagara*s or great cities, implying not only a diversity of urban forms but a hierarchy among urban centres themselves. The *Digha Nikaya* refers to six *mahanagara*s at the time of the Buddha: Champa, Rajagriha, Shravasti, Saketa (Ayodhya), Kaushambi and Banaras. (Chattopadhyaya, 2003:107) All these are attested archaeologically as thriving cities of the Second Urbanisation.

One of the qualities of *mahanagara*s and other large cities that set them apart from lesser towns was that they were nodes of long-distance convergence – of commodities as well as peoples. Thus we hear of the Northern and Southern great trade routes, *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapatha*, respectively, which crisscrossed the subcontinent, passing through a large number of cities and towns, such as Takshashila, Mathura, Pataliputra, Tamralipti, Ujjayini, Pratishthana, in addition to the six enumerated above. These cities were very important centres of artisanal production, consumption, and commerce of the early historic period and that is one of the chief reasons they rose to preeminence. We hear of their great wealth and grandeur in different texts across the period.

It is no wonder then that the *nagara* marked the literary imagination of the civilisation that took root in the Gangetic valley, the Northern Peninsula, and beyond. Before we look at texts that celebrate urbanism, however, it is important to note that not all textual traditions of the time endorsed urban culture or living in cities. The Buddhist Pali texts seem to embrace urbanism perhaps since Buddhism was itself an urban religion, born and propagated in cities like Sarnath, Rajgir, Vaishali and Shravasti. Moreover, the Buddhist *sangha*, though located outside settlements, had an active relationship with urban dwellers, especially the rich and the influential sections, such as kings and merchants (*gahapati*s, *setthi-gahapati*s) who were major patrons.

13.3 CITY IN *TRIPITAKA* AND *DHARMASUTRAS*

The Brahmanical *Dharmasutra*s, such as those of Gautama, Baudhayana and Apastamba, composed contemporaneously with the Pali texts, between 500 and 200 BCE, speak of the city, with its dust and noise, as a place unfit for the performance of Vedic sacrifices. Indeed they proscribe the recitation of the Vedas in a city (though we read in other texts that it nonetheless happened). (Chattopadhyaya, 2003:125-6) Moreover, a *snataka* or student of the scriptures is also enjoined to avoid living in a city. Clearly, according to this school of thought, *dharma* or righteousness/piety was imperiled by city-living.

One of the reasons for this would have been deemed to be the sociological heterogeneity an urban settlement hosted, such as the commingling of a number of social and ethnic

groups, which would have made the maintenance of ritual purity and avoidance of ritual pollution difficult. What else could have been the reasons behind such apprehensions about the city? We may find the answer in other, later texts that offer a different discourse centred on the city.

13.4 CITY IN *KAVYAS*

Best representative of this discourse is Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* (third century CE), a treatise on refined living and pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. The *Kamasutra* ordains that a city or town (*nagare-pattane-kharvate va*) is *the* place to learn how to lead a culturally and sexually active and accomplished life. It virtually recommends the *nagaraka*, the urban connoisseur, and the *ganika*, the sophisticated courtesan or prostitute, as models of masculine and feminine behaviour, respectively. And it suggests the cultivation of sex and erotics as an essential feature of (elite) urban life.

It has been recently argued by Shonaleeka Kaul that the *Kamasutra*, together with an allied genre of texts known as *kavya*, depicts the city as the site of a culture of desire or *kama* culture. (Kaul, 2010)This extends to a general sensuousness; thanks to its physical and social features, the city emerges as a place where all five senses could be aroused and engaged. Let us understand this in some detail based on perspectives from *kavya*s. (Kaul, 2010: 195-208)

*Kavya*s are highly aesthetic or artistic literature and include poetry, drama, tale and biography. This is the realm of Sanskrit (cum Prakrit) creative literature the bulk of which, produced in the first seven or eight centuries CE, was contemporary to early Indian urbanism. The texts explicitly and abundantly locate themselves in cities, like Pataliputra, also known as Kusumapura in the texts, Varanasi or Kashi, Ujjayini, Kanchi, and Mathura. They resonate with an urban situatedness. *Kavya*s thus appear to be primarily urban literature.

Now, in *kavya*s generally the representation of the city is awash with the theme of love and sex and sensual pleasure – directly stated or implied and insinuated. If this isn't obvious from the colours in which the *kavya* hero and heroine, the *nagaraka* and *ganika*, are painted, it is reiterated by a glimpse of some of the popular urban motifs recurrently played in the texts.[2] For instance, the city seems always full of beautiful women and (less frequently mentioned) men who look like *Kama,* the love god. The women are always in love dalliance or busy preparing for it by enhancing their beauty, and the men flock to the courtesans' quarter or flirt with maids on the highway or in pleasure haunts. Drinking and gambling, music and dance are favourite depicted occupations. The home of all the arts (*sakalakalah dadhanah*), the city is always in festival – sex itself is celebrated as an *utsava* while one of the popular festive occasions is the worship of *Kamadeva,* the god of love. Pleasure groves are cherished urban assets frequented in droves. The city is likened to Bhogavati, the *asuric* [demon] capital, as well as to Amaravati, the heavenly city, both for the pleasures it affords – pleasures that could implicate even the ascetic. For indeed, nuns and monks are routinely shown serving as messengers of love in the city. 'Served fearlessly by *Kamadeva*', 'where the tremulous delights of amorous union (*kaminidhuvanalila)* abound', the city is described in the *kavya*s as 'the place to obtain the fruits of desire (*phalamvikalam kamukatvasya*)'. (Kaul, 2010: 195-196)

[2] Interestingly, virtually all of these motifs can be found depicted in sculpture as well from early historic urban centres like Mathura, Rajghat, Kaushambi, Sanchi and Bharhut. See for some examples N.P. Joshi, *Life in Ancient Uttarapatha: Material Civilization of Northern India from c.200 BC to c.300 AD as Revealed by Sculptures, Terracottas and Coins*, 1967, Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Press, pp. 224-34.

*Kavya*s thus seem to present the ancient Indian city as essentially a site for gratification. What is it about the city that could have prompted, if not justified, this? And is the *kavya* representation to be taken literally or were the texts trying to say something more? For instance, together with the *Kamasutra*, *kavya*s seem to render erotics as a form of art rather than instinct – something that is to be assiduously cultivated by the connoisseur.This then may define the city as a civilisational centre where urges of 'nature' could be tamed and exalted to 'culture'.

Moreover, together with the attention to *kama* or pleasure, we also see in *kavya*s a tension between *kama* and *dharma* or virtue, a concern for mediating or reconciling the former with the latter. For instance, rhetorical descriptions of the city often assert that the citizens were 'devoted to virtue', 'self-controlled, pure as seers in disposition and conduct', 'righteous and decorous', and so on. This suggests that it is not a notion of unadulterated gratification that is attributed to the city; there does seem to be a consciousness of socio-moral constraints. But at the same time, the *kama*-centric characterisation of the city may show that *kavya*s perceive the city as an unstrictured social space – not an immoral or amoral world but one that *could* be free of the often repressive concerns of religion and society without resorting to rebellion.

This in turn may be attributed to what appears to be, in the *kavya*'s assessment, the attenuated force of any concerted socio-religious authority in the city, like the brahmanas. The brahmanas are occasionally seen in traditional roles, but it is usually their irrelevance in addressing peculiarly urban moral issues, or the ease with which their command can be defied or bypassed, that is on view. For example, in the fifth century play *Padataditaka*, the *brahmana pithika* of the city is unable to expiate the "sin" of a prostitute kicking the head of her paramour in love sport because it is simply not to be found in the traditional law books. (*Padataditaka*, 1975: 110) In another play, the third century *Avimaraka*, the protagonist and his friend, both living as *antyaja*s (outcastes) outside the city, are seen routinely and easily entering and traversing the city despite a *shastric* prohibition. (*Avimaraka,* Chapter II, 1970: 261)

Contributing to the diminution in the voice of socio-religious power in the city, and to the unfettering of social behaviour, is the fact that the city is the projected seat of the king. The king's power in practice is seen in the texts to be more coercive than ethical. For example, he could even defy considerations of caste hierarchy and override the *shastric* injunction against death to a brahmana, as we see in the *Mrcchakatikam,* a fifth century play.

Along with the king, big merchants, referred to in the texts as *nagaramukhyah* or *pradhanapurusah,* exerted great influence on the urban socio-political structure. Having access to the king, these men can be expected to have wielded enormous clout either in alliance with him or separately in their own right. The merchant's power being the power of wealth, here was another secular factor in the displacement of traditional brahmanical leadership in urban society.

And what about the institution of caste? In one view, at the level of ideal, the city sees the fullest possible development of caste, since it is the only site where all four *varna*s were to be found together. However, contradictions in the actual world of caste were also most forcibly articulated in the city. For example, from the texts it appears that wealth overrode caste in determining social status. Here is a powerful example from the *Mrcchakatikam*. The *yajnopavita,* thread of initiation, is the ultimate sacred mark of high caste. Sharvilaka is a brahmana, the highest of the high castes. Yet, since he is driven by poverty to commit theft, the value of the sacred thread to a brahmana in his position is merely that of a handy substitute for the thief's measuring tape! (*Mrcchakatika*, Chapter III, Verse 19, 1962: 121) Using it in this way, he declaims:

> Indeed the *yajnopavita* is a very important serviceable article to a brahmana, particularly to one of my profession! For —
>
> With this one measures the passage to be made in the wall and breaks off the fastenings of ornaments. It serves as a key when the door is securely locked, and as a ligature when one is bitten by insects or snakes.
>
> ***Mrcchakatika of Sudraka,* translated by M.R. Kale (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962), Chapter III. p. 115**

In short, it is for him everything except a status symbol, for the status itself of which it is a symbol means little in conditions of poverty. Ostensibly ridiculing a symbol of socio-moral authority (the *yajnopavita*), the episode almost certainly carries this deeper satire on the redundance of traditional categories of social status in the face of urban poverty.

We may also look at another incident from the *Mrcchakatikam*. Chandanaka and Viraka, royal police guards, get caught up in a rousing quarrel with each other which quickly gets personal. Descending to the calling of names, each asks the other to recall his *jati* (*atmano jatim na smarasi*), i.e. his real station. And it is revealed that one was a cobbler and the other a barber by caste. (*Mrcchakatika*, Chapter VI, 1962: 239) Both revelations are followed by the taunt: 'And you have (now) become an officer in the army!'

The incident suggests a couple of points about the urban social order. One, that there need be no correlation or contraindication between caste and profession in a city. Secondly, the fact that low caste characters abuse each other by harping on the other's low ritual position – tends to show that the social value attached to caste may matter more at the lower end of the scale in the city, while at the upper end, status is a correlate not so much of caste as of wealth. Alternatively, the abusive use of the names of low *jati*s may be an indicator of a certain trivialisation that the traditional social system underwent in the city.

As with brahmanical authority so with caste, mercantile and political power can be seen as factors that controvert the traditional social system in the city. Commerce is by nature an 'open' specialisation, and we have evidence from the *dharmashastra*s of trading corporations or guilds (*shreni*s) that derive their membership from several castes but subsist 'by the occupation of one caste'. (P.V. Kane cited by Pocock, 1992: 24)

Perhaps the biggest reason for the urban social scene being characterised in the *kavya*s by the breakdown of the omnipresence of traditional bases of socio-moral order – is the concentration of variety in the city. There is across the texts evidence of a vibrant miscellaneous sociological congregation within the city. Sample the kinds of castes, professions, ethnicities and religious faiths it is possible to find in a city in the *kavya*s: There were of course *brahmana*s, kings, *shresthi*s and *shudra*s; also cobblers, barbers and *chandalas* by caste. However, such kinds were also encountered as were begotten by a cobbler off a maid servant, but claimed 'without any scruple' to be alternately son and brother of the superintendent of sugarworks (*sarkarapalam*) in whose house his mother (the maid servant) lived. (*Padataditaka*, 1975: 143) There were also the *bandhulas*, translated as bastards, the mixed illegitimate progeny of courtesans living with and off the latter. (*Mrcchakatikam*, Chapter IV, Verse 28, 1962: 163) By the nature of their birth, these social types illustrate the utterly unorthodox and chaotic texture the city's social fabric could display.

The impression of complex variety is intensified by the mix of regional and ethnic affiliations. For example, in the *Padataditaka*, a fourth century erotico-comic play, it is said of the suggestively titled Universal city, *Sarvabhaumanagara*, that

> By the coming here of kings by hundreds from hills, from islands and from sea coasts, and their settling down in different parts of the city, the people learn here, as it were, in the same place the strange and manifold story of the creation of Brahma ...
>
> This city is full of pleasure by the assembling here of the Shakas, Yavanas, Tusharas, Parashikas, Kiratas, Kalingas, Vangas, Magadhas, Angas, Mahishakas, Cholas, Pandyas and Keralas.
>
> ***Padataditaka*, Verse 23-24, 1975: 115**

The professions and occupations the city is seen to sustain run the whole gamut from ministers of the king, judges of the court of justice, and *acharyas* or professors, to scribes, physicians, merchants, grammarians, guards, bards, courtesans, *vitas, dhurtas, pithamardas*, *vina* players, dance masters, drummers, master-painters, and *sabhikas* (club keeper), down to male/female servants (*cheta/cheti, paricarakah, dasi*), carpenters, gardeners, elephant riders, cart drivers, *sairindhris* (itinerant female helpers), cowherds, horse keepers and masseurs *et al*.[3]

The city is also heterogeneously composed in matters of religious persuasion. Apart from the Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and Kapalika adherents we see as characters in the texts, we are also told in the *Saundaranandam*, a second century epic poem, of 'other paths'(*anyamatah*) people followed in the city of Kapilavastu and that the Buddha was careful not to upset by his preaching. (*Saundarananda,* 1928: III.16; V.5; XVIII. 62) We are looking, then, at a social order run through by religio-ideological plurality.

In addition, the *Sarvabhauma* city hosted *vita*s (libertines) from diverse regions and cities viz. the Deccan, Lata (Gujarat), Dashapura, Vidarbha, Aparanta (Konkan), Bahlika, Surashtra, Avanti and Shurparaka. There were also *vita*s described by their tribes as a Shivi, an Abhira, a Dindi, and a hill man. Similarly, courtesans from Pataliputra, Kashi and Simhala as well as a Yavana prostitute resided there. Interestingly, some of these are shown to bring with them their peculiar regional practices, (*Padataditaka*, 1975: 126, 155-7) so that they infused the city with behavioural complexity as well. All in all, a cosmopolis at every level.

Interestingly, the social structure of the city tallies with its physical structure as depicted in *kavya*s. The *rajamarga* or royal road seems to represent the hub of the city in these texts. Partly on account of many streets and their catchment areas feeding into and being accessed through the royal road, the overwhelming characteristic of this highway is its crowds. There were horses, elephants, chariots and other vehicles passing through, and of course teeming pedestrians *(anekapurushasampate rajamarge.)* Among them were all manner of people including the drunk, and the poor and invalid *(pratyangahinanavikalendriyanashca),* in addition to a host of monks, merchants, courtesans, *vita*s, genteel men and hoi polloi, strolling, chatting, lounging around or at work. (Kaul, 2010: 95) Indeed the *Padmaprabhrtaka,* a third century monologue play, aptly comments: 'On the royal road the touch of strangers is easy to come by' (*rajamarge sulabhamaviditajanasansparsham)*. (*Padmaprabhrtaka* , 1975: 54 of Sanskrit text)

Now, the very qualities the *rajamarga* symbolizes, dominate the urban social order too, viz. variety, mobility, congestion and intermingling. Indeed, some verses in the *Chaturbhani* (fourth century monologue plays) capturing the city in terms of the variegated sounds it produced, also capture symbolically the nature of the urban social order. These sounds – chanting of the Vedas, clinking of ornaments, recitation of poems,

[3] Inscriptional evidence from the tenth century reflects the variety of occupational groups occurring in the town of Siyadoni, viz. merchants, potters, distillers of spirit, sellers of betel, oil makers, stone cutters, *sutradharas*, etc. See F. Kielhorn, 'Siyadoni Stone Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica,* I, 1892, pp.162-179.

twanging of bowstrings, chopping of meat, whinnying of horses, etc. – convey vibrant heterogeneity, a random, crowded miscellany. This can be interpreted as essaying a literary perception that there was no one, primary urban social order, only multiple micro orders. These seem to bring into being a meta-order, which was the sum total of the city. The suggested complexity – social, economic, ideological and behavioural – lay at the heart of civilisation as represented by the city.

Interestingly, this is a picture one gets from early Tamil literature from the deep south, as well. The epic *Shilappadikaram*, from circa sixth century CE, depicts the port town of Puhar (Kanchipuram) as a bustling and sensuous hive:

> The sunshine lighted up the open terraces, the harbor docks, the towers with their loopholes like the eyes of deer. In various quarters of the city the homes of wealthy Greeks were seen. Near the harbor seamen from far off lands appeared at home. In the streets hawkers were selling unguents, bath powders, cooling oils, flowers, perfume, incense. Weavers brought their fine silks and all kinds of fabrics made of wool or cotton. There were special streets for merchants of coral, sandalwood, myrrh, jewelry, faultless pearls, pure gold, and precious gems.
>
> In another quarter lived grain merchants, their stocks piled up in mounds. Washermen, bakers, vintners, fishermen, and dealers in salt crowded the shops, where they bought betel nuts, perfume, sheep, oil, meat and bronzes. One could see coppersmiths, carpenters, goldsmiths, tailors, shoemakers, and clever craftsmen making toys out of cork or rags; and musicians, expert in each branch of the art, who demonstrated their mastery… Workmen displayed their skills in hundreds of small crafts. Each trade had its own street in the workers' quarter of the city.
>
> At the centre of the city were the wide royal street, the street of temple cars, the bazaar, and the main street, where rich merchants had their mansions with high towers. There was a street for priests, one for doctors, one for astrologers, one for peasants… In another quarter lived the coachmen, bards, dancers, astronomers, clowns, prostitutes, actresses, florists, betel-sellers, servants, drummers, jugglers and acrobats…
>
> … Between the quarters of the workers and the nobles lay an open square, large as a battlefield … There, under rows of trees, the sheds of a market were set up. The haggling of buyers and sellers could be heard there all day long.
>
> ***The Shilappadikaram*, 1993: 18-19**

A.K. Ramanujan denotes this realistic chaos depicted in Puhar as heterogenetic, as opposed to orthogenetic descriptions of cities, like that of Ayodhya in the Valmiki *Ramayana* (fifth century BCE – fifth century CE) which seems to present a static, idealized, traditional and moral world. Witness:

> There was situated the world-famous city of Ayodhya, a city *built by Manu himself*, lord of men… It was majestic, unequaled in splendor …unassailable by its enemies…*laid out like a chess board* …The outer walls of its dwellings were well constructed, and it was *filled with good men*. Indeed, it was like a palace in the sky that perfected beings had attained through austerities… King Dasaratha had populated the entire city with thousands of great chariot warriors … men who would never loose their arrows upon a foe who was isolated from his comrades, the sole support of his family, in hiding, or in flight … The king also peopled the city with great Brahmans … *men who were devoted to truth.*
>
> ***The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. I.5**
>
> In that great city men were happy, righteous, and deeply learned. They were truthful and not covetous … All the men and women conducted themselves with righteousness and were self-controlled and joyful. … they were *pure as the great seers* themselves… Nowhere in Ayodhya could one find a lecher, a miser, a cruel or unlearned man, or an agnostic … The ksatriyas accepted the Brahmans as their superiors, and the vaisyas were subservient to the ksatriyas. The sudras, devoted to their proper duty, served the other three classes. [emphasis added]
>
> ***The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. I.6**

It has been observed that the 'unrealistic perfection of arrangements, both physical and social, has the symbolic function of projecting a metaphysical order' and cultural homogeneity, in Ayodhya's case. In contrast, Puhar gives the impression of being the classic case of an open city where heterogeneity and a-normativity thrive. (Ramanujan, 1999: 63, 68-69) Thus literature could imbue cities with character by a symbolic representation of the urban. And such symbolic characterisations of an ancient city, which are derived from and consistent with the text's world view, have deeply affected and endured in the popular imagination. Thus Ayodhya is the archetypal city of the Moral Order, housing the paragon of morality and virtue (*maryadapurushottama*), prince Rama. Thus also the city of Mathura is identified with lord Krishna because of the literary association in texts like the *Harivamsha Purana*. In his study of this association, R.P. Goldman speaks of the 'cultural and emotional significance of a place important in literature' and of the 'realities of fantasy' that were 'often far more keenly felt' than those of history and geography. (Goldman, 1986: 471) This dimension to the history of an ancient city, being largely a mythic-symbolic construct, exceeds archaeological or material verification; yet it is an integral part of the historical identity and career of the city. It is through a study of literature alone that we are able to access and comprehend this fascinating aspect of early Indian urbanism.

13.5 SUMMARY

The representation of cities in ancient Indian texts varied depending on the nature of the text: Thus the *Arthasastra* put the state at the centre of its description of the urban layout while the *Dharmasutras* emphasized the concerns of *dharma* and the *Kamasutra* those of pleasure and erotics. From *kavyas* we obtain a picture of cities being heterogenously constituted in terms of the social background of its citizens, the occupations they followed, and the faiths to which they subscribed. The sociological character of the city, like its physical character, was marked by mobility, congestion, and intermingling, best glimpsed on the royal road. In still other texts like the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*, cities are often depicted in mythico-symbolic ways.

13.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the depiction of the capital city in the *Arthasastra*.

2) Contrast the attitude to cities in the early Pali texts and the *Dharmasutras*.

3) In aesthetic texts the city is described as a site of a culture of desire. Explain.

4) Bring out the unique features of the urban social order as represented in *kavyas*.

5) Mythico-symbolic representations are an important part of the identity of a city. Do you agree?

6) Complexity lay at the heart of the idea of civilisation as represented by the city. Explain.

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UNIT 14 EARLY HISTORIC CITIES IN THE TAXILA VALLEY: ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES*

Structure

14.1 Introduction

14.2 The Taxila Valley

14.3 History of Explorations and Excavations in the Taxila Valley

14.4 Pre Urban Settlements in the Taxila Valley

14.5 Cities in the Taxila Valley
- 14.5.1 Bhir Mound
- 14.5.2 The Parthian City at Sirkap
- 14.5.3 The Kushan City at Sirsukh

14.6 Sacred Spaces Outside Cities

14.7 Cities at a Crossroads

14.8 Summary

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14.10 References

14.1 INTRODUCTION

It is truly remarkable that for nearly thousand years (from about 500 BCE till 500 CE), successive cities existed at the three adjacent sites of Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh, all circumscribed within an area of 6 kilometres in the Taxila valley. The valley lies in the western half of the Potwar plateau, which is located between the Indus and Jhelum rivers, nearly 42 kilometres northwest of Islamabad in present day Pakistan (see Map 14.1 and Figure 14.1). This Unit discusses these three cities and the sacred spaces outside them based on the archaeological excavations that were carried out in the Taxila valley.

14.2 THE TAXILA VALLEY

The Taxila valley (18 × 8 kilometres) is surrounded by the Murree hills in the east, Sarda hills in the north and the Margala hills in the south (see **Figure 14.1**). The Hathial ridge divides the valley into two unequal parts, with the more fertile northern section being much larger than the southern which is intersected by ravines and stony outcrops. On the whole the agriculturally productive Taxila valley stands in contrast to the hills in the north and northeast, and the thorny scrub wastelands to its south, southwest, and southeast (Marshall, 1951: 2-3; Allchin, 1993: 70). The valley in the past would have had an adequate supply of water for agriculture from moderate rainfall, apart from the Haro river and its tributaries, Tamra and Lundi, as well as the abundant springs along the base of the Margala hills.

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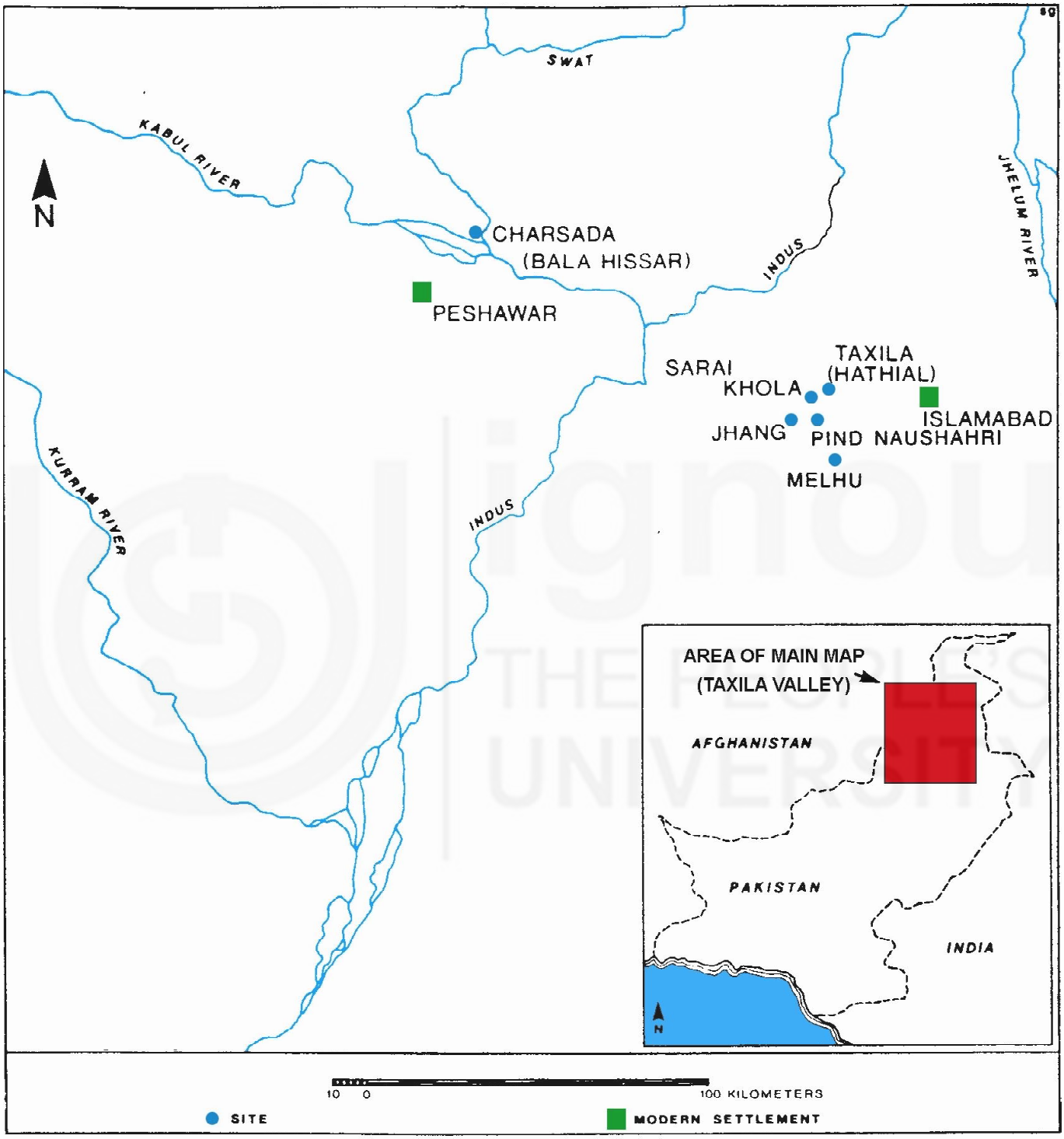

Map 14.1: Location of Sites in the Taxila Valley [After Allchin, 1993: Map 1]

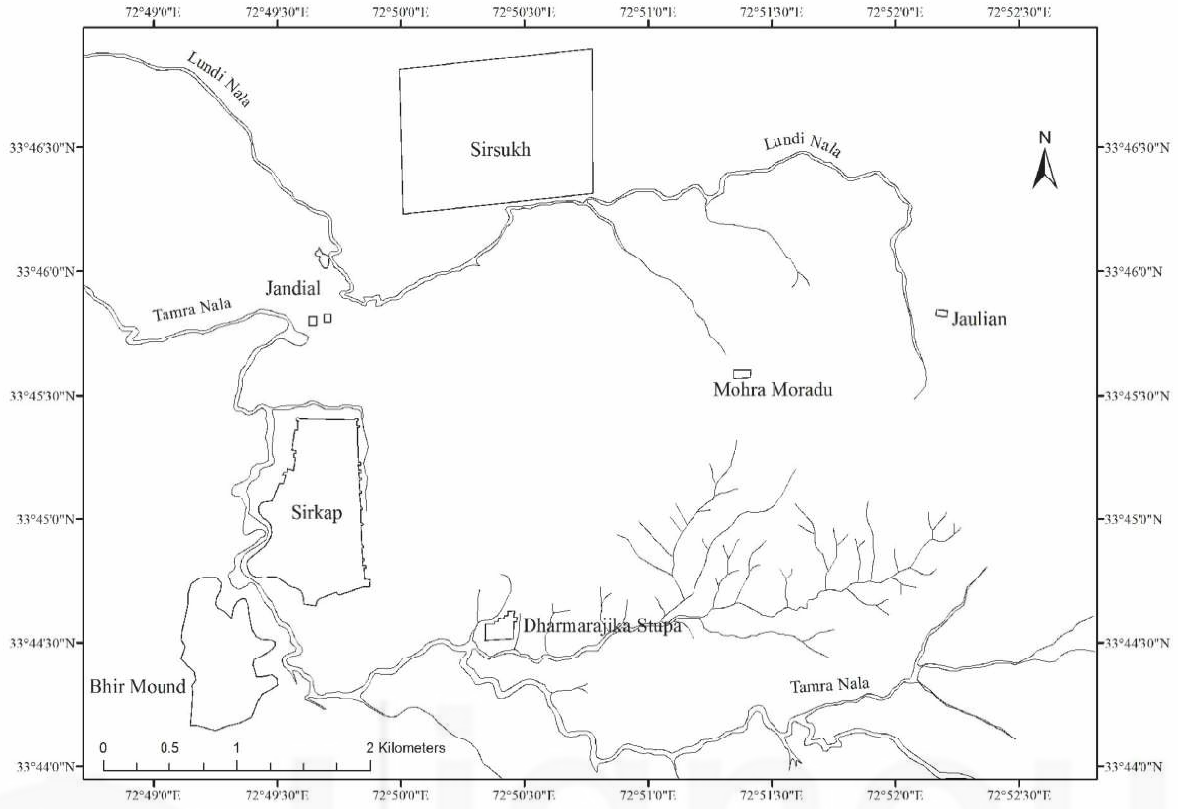

Figure 14.1: Location of Bhir, Sirkap and Sirsukh [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 1]

Another factor that played a critical role in the location would have been the proximity to ancient routes. In the Early Historic period, the route which connected the Gangetic plains with Central Asia through Afghanistan passed through the Taxila valley. Accessible routes linked the Taxila valley to West Asia and Central Asia through Gandhara and Peshawar area in the northwest, to China through Kashmir in the northeast, and to the Indian subcontinent through Punjab in the southeast. There may also have been an ancient riverine route to the Indus delta in the southwest, although so far no Early Historic urban centres have been reported in Sind. It is significant that there is only one place where the Indus river can be forded which is a few kilometres north of Attock, about 50 kilometres west of the present town of Taxila, as elsewhere a boat is needed even in the dry season. Hence for crossing the Indus river, one has to pass through the Taxila valley.

The most important reason for the establishment of urban centres in the Taxila valley around 500 BCE and their persistence till at least 500 CE was however due to political and military factors. Fussman (1993: 87) has argued that the location of the Taxila valley was critical in two different contexts. The first was when a Central Asian power wanted to 'keep a watch over Gangetic India' or 'use it as a springboard against Inner India' as was the case with the Achaemenians, Greeks and Kushans. The second was when a state in South Asia, as the Mauryans, had an interest in areas to the north or west of the Taxila valley, like the present day Iran or Afghanistan.

14.3 HISTORY OF EXPLORATIONS AND EXCAVATIONS IN THE TAXILA VALLEY

It was Alexander Cunningham (1872: 111-35), of the Archaeological Survey of India, who initially surveyed in the Taxila valley in 1863-64 with it its multiple cities and fortifications. Cunningham's surveys in the Panjab were guided by the routes taken by

Alexander (327-326 BCE) as well as the Buddhist pilgrims from China, Faxian (399-414 CE) and Xuanzang (629-639 CE).

> In comparing the existing ruins of ancient Panjab cities with the different accounts that we possess in the Chinese and classical authors, I propose to follow the footsteps of Alexander himself. I have already noticed the fact that, as the Chinese pilgrims as well as the Macedonian conquerors entered the Panjab from the west, their routes will mutually illustrate each other….With their journals in our hands, we may venture to visit the ruined cities of the Panjab with the certainty that our time will not be wasted in fruitless research.
>
> (Cunningham, 1872: 82)

It is important to note that Cunningham was interested not so much in the numerous urban centres but the areas surrounding them that were dotted with over 55 stupas, 28 monasteries, and 9 temples. He (1875: 66-75) revisited in 1872-73 to undertake further surveys and probings of these religious monuments.

The task of excavating the cities in the Taxila valley was taken up by John Marshall, also of the Archaeological Survey of India, who was drawn to this region from the moment he set his eyes on it in 1903.

> It is upwards of forty years since I first visited Taxila and I still remember the thrill I got from the sight of its buried cities. At that time I was a young man, fresh from archaeological excavations in Greece and filled with enthusiasm for anything Greek; and in that far-off corner of the Panjab it seemed as if I had lighted of a sudden on a bit of Greece itself. Doubtless the illusion was prompted in a large measure by Taxila's historic associations with Greece; for it was in Taxila that Alexander the Great halted and refreshed his army before advancing to do battle with Porus; and it was here that Greek kings afterwards ruled for a hundred years and left behind them an enduring legacy of Hellenistic culture. But there was more to it than that. I felt then, as I have never ceased to feel since, that there was something appealingly Greek in the countryside itself: in the groves of wild olive on the rocky slopes, in the distant pine-clad hills below Murree, and in the chill, invigorating air that blows from the snow-fields beyond the Indus. No wonder that I was all eagerness to get to work on such an alluring site and uncover with pick and spade whatever might be left of its ancient secrets.
>
> (Marshall, 1951: xv)

However it took almost a decade before Marshall could begin excavation here in the spring of 1913. At the same time it is quite remarkable that Marshall continued excavating here every autumn and spring (the two seasons when digging is possible as summers are too warm and winters too cold) till 1934. This is the only example in the Indian subcontinent where excavations at one site have been carried out uninterrupted for nearly twenty two years. It also needs to be noted that apart from the Harappan cities the only Early Historic urban centres where large scale horizontal excavations have been carried out are those in the Taxila valley. For this, credit has to be given solely to Marshall's vision and understanding of archaeology.

Small scale excavations were resumed by the Archaeological Survey of India for one season in 1944-45 at the Bhir Mound by Mortimer Wheeler (1946: 1-3) and at Sirkap by Amalananda Ghosh (1947: 41-84) for two reasons. The primary purpose was to train Indian students in field archaeological methods. The second was to ascertain whether there was any evidence of human occupation prior to the early historic levels. After a gap of over two decades Muhammad Sharif of the Pakistan Department of Archaeology conducted a small excavation at the Bhir Mound in 1967. In the early eighties, Frank Raymond Allchin, as part of the British Archaeological Mission, carried out a reconnaissance but not an intensive survey in some parts of the Taxila valley and Gulzar Muhammad Khan of the Pakistan Department of Archaeology excavated at Hathial (Allchin, 1993). During the last thirty years, no further archaeological work has

been carried out here, partly because in 1980 the archaeological complex in the Taxila valley was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Yet despite such a notification, a report by the Global Heritage Fund in 2010 mentioned that the archaeological sites in the Taxila valley are being continually damaged due to poor management, pressure of development, looting by treasure hunters, as well as war and conflict. We need to ponder as to why such historically important sites are being destroyed so rapidly in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Even though the archaeological sites in the Taxila valley have been excavated over such a long period, yet several problems remain. First no systematic intensive survey has ever been undertaken in the Taxila valley. Second, as most of the large scale excavations were carried out nearly eighty years ago, according to the methods then prevalent, a lot of contextual information is absent. Third, mostly whole artefacts were collected and not the broken or incomplete objects. Fourth, hardly any attention was paid to debitage that can provide important information about different crafts that may have been practiced. We also do not have any information about areas where craft production would have taken place. Fifth, while a lot of houses were excavated, the location of doors of the rooms is not clear. Often it is hard to distinguish between rooms and courtyards. (Fussman, 1993: 84) Sixth, the information about the fortifications too is scanty.

14.4 PRE URBAN SETTLEMENTS IN THE TAXILA VALLEY

The earliest evidence for human habitation in the Taxila valley comes from Khanpur cave, about 11 kilometres from the Taxila Museum. Here microliths have been excavated and dated to the Mesolithic period. (Dani, 1986: 19) In the absence of radiocarbon dates, it is difficult to infer the chronology of the Mesolithic occupation here. Elsewhere in the subcontinent, the Mesolithic phase has been dated between 10,000 and 4000 BCE (Singh, 2009: 83). We are, however, on surer grounds when it comes to the Neolithic-Chalcolithic occupations which followed. For instance at Sarai Khola (now known as Kala Sarai), about 1.6 kilometres southwest of the present day town of Taxila, there is evidence of Neolithic (3100-2800 BCE) as well as Chalcolithic (2700-2100 BCE) settlement. The latter is represented by the Early Kot Diji (2700-2200 BCE) and the Late Kot Diji (2200-2100 BCE) phases. Apart from Sarai Khola there are several other sites with the Early Kot Diji occupations as at Jhang and Melhu (see Map 14.1). Similarly Late Kot Diji settlements have been identified at Jhang, Melhu, Pind Naushahri and Hathial (Allchin, 1993: 71-72).

In a survey carried out by Allchin, Red Burnished Ware (dated between 890 and 500 BCE) was found spread over an area of 13 hectares at Hathial. This pottery has also been reported from Pind Naushahri. Allchin (1993: 72-73) has suggested that this Red Burnished Ware is closely related to the pottery of the third phase (800-400 BCE) of the Gandhara Grave complex of Swat. He also found a similarity between Red Burnished Ware and the burnished Soapy Red Ware that was found in the lowest levels during excavations by Wheeler at Charsada. Around 500/400 BCE the settlement at Hathial was abandoned and a new city came up immediately to its south on the Bhir Mound but across the Tamra rivulet. What still remains an open question is whether the settlement at Hathial was rural or urban in nature. This is a question which can only be answered if excavations are to be carried out at Hathial at some point in future. Until then we have to assume that the first urban centre in the Taxila valley gradually developed at Bhir Mound a little before 500 BCE when the Achaemenians began ruling over this part of the subcontinent.

14.5 CITIES IN THE TAXILA VALLEY

The earliest city that came up at Bhir Mound around 500 BCE lasted till 200 BCE. While it may have emerged a little before 500 BCE under the Achaemenians, between 300 and 200 BCE this city would have been a part of the Mauryan empire. Unlike the Bactrian Greeks, Shakas, Parthians and Kushans, the Mauryans did not build a new city at Bhir Mound. Around 200 BCE the Bactrian Greeks built a new city, Sirkap, to its north on the Hathial ridge (see **Figure 14.1**). Over the Bactrian Greek city (200-100 BCE), successive cities (between 100 BCE and 100 CE) were built, first by the Shakas and then by the Parthians. At the end of 100 CE, once again the location of the next city, Sirsukh, shifted further north across the Lundi stream. This city was built by the Kushans and was possibly occupied till about 500 CE. As cities shifted their locations their sizes too continually increased, with Bhir Mound measuring about 70 hectares, Sirkap was nearly 78 hectares and Sirsukh around 137 hectares (Erdosy, 1987: 2). It also needs to be noted that not all these cities could be excavated by Marshall. Although his interest lay primarily in the Bactrian Greek city at Sirkap, however, his excavations remained largely confined to the Parthian city that lay closest to the surface. As he wrote in the Preface to the Taxila report (1951: xvi), archaeologically it was much more valuable to have excavated the Parthian city rather than the Bactrian Greek, as very few Parthian cities have been excavated when compared to the Greek cities. While Sirsukh remained largely unexcavated, a limited excavation was undertaken by Marshall at Bhir Mound. Here too he concentrated on the upper levels which may have largely corresponded with the Mauryan period occupation.

14.5.1 Bhir Mound

As with numerous Early Historic cities in North India, the urban centre at Bhir Mound too had a fortification of mud bricks and timber. What seems to be the case with this earliest city is that unlike the later cities, this was not planned and it slowly expanded haphazardly, as a result of which the lay out appeared to be somewhat irregular. While there was one wide main street, the rest of the streets and lanes were quite narrow, the latter at times would have enabled the passage of just a single person. Amidst the dense urban housing separated by narrow streets and lanes, occasionally there were small open squares to allow pack animals to pass one another. Marshall (1951: 90-91) has pointed out that while the level of the main street was deliberately kept low, those of the side-streets and lanes as well as the adjoining houses on the main street steadily rose over time.

Most side-streets and lanes were provided with open surface drains constructed of rough stone for carrying rain water alone, although these did not connect to a larger drain in the main street. What appears to be the case was that during the monsoon months the rain water from the drains in the side-streets and lanes would have emptied on to the main street. Houses too had surface drains but these were meant for carrying the rain water from the courtyards to the streets.

There were separate arrangements for the disposal of sewage and refuse. For the former, soak-wells were built both inside houses as well as in the open squares in the city. Generally one soak-well was located in the courtyard and the other in the bathing, washing or cooking area. In the earliest phase, the soak-wells comprised of just a circular shaft filled with upturned pots. In the later phases, these could be lined with calcrete[1] and limestone along with the filling of upturned pots. Other types of soak-wells were rectangular in shape and lined with stone masonry, or they could be built of terracotta rings or large storage jars (see **Figures 14.2 and 14.3**).

[1] A layer of calcium carbonate and other alkaline minerals in the soil.

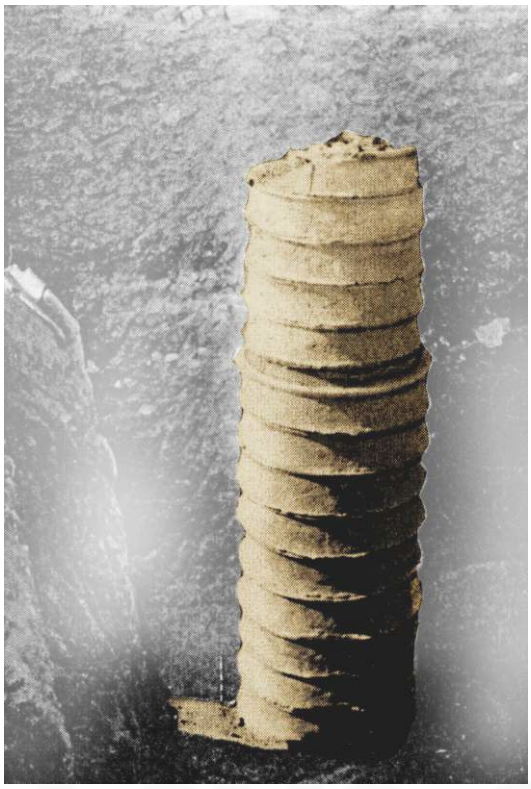

Figure 14.2: Soak-well Built of Terracotta Rings at Bhir Mound [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 6b]

Figure 14.3: Soak-well Built of Storage Jars at Bhir Mound [After Blakiston, 1927: Plate VIIIb]

Large public bins, also built of rubble, were placed intermittently in public squares and streets. These were meant for the refuse from the streets as well as houses. One such bin that was excavated was full of bones and potsherds. Clearly this system of garbage disposal would have worked, provided the bins were emptied regularly. Given that the excavated bin was still full of refuse, one is not very sure about how clean the city would have been in the past. Further it also raises questions about the identities/status of workers who would have been deputed for this task.

Just as the urban centre at Bhir Mound showed scant evidence of planning, so was the case with the houses with their irregular plans. In fact if one were to examine the plans of the excavated houses at Bhir Mound (see **Figure 14.4**), it is almost impossible to identify individual houses. What seems to be the case are blocks of buildings, for example Block MN, in Figure 14.4. To the west of Block MN is the First Street, towards the east is the Fourth Street, and to the north is Lane 3. Block MN had over sixty rooms and open courts. Marshall (1951: 92) himself was totally flummoxed and he wrote that 'it may be taken for granted that the block comprised at least two or three houses, if not more; but which were the particular dividing walls between the several houses is a puzzle that the reader can solve almost as well as the excavator.' This difficulty of clearly delineating houses is evident with another group of buildings (see **Figure 14.5**), with its numerous rooms and courtyards. The reason for this is that different houses seemed to have shared common walls. While blocks are separated from each other by streets and lanes, houses on the other hand seem to merge into each other. The latter could be a reflection of close ties between the residents of adjacent houses.

Figure 14.4: Streets and Houses at Bhir Mound [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 2]

Figure 14.5: Plan of Buildings at Bhir Mound [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 9]

Even in the case of what Marshall (see **Figure 14.6**) considered as two distinct houses, K and H, it appears that the latter may have comprised of two rather than one single house. House K is surrounded by streets on three sides and is separated by a lane from House H. The former has two small courtyards (labelled as Courts 1 and 2) and nearly twenty four small rooms on the ground floor. Marshall has argued that most of these houses had rooms on the first floor as well, which makes one wonder whether several kin related families and also non-kin members of the household lived together. It however needs to be pointed out that no evidence of an actual staircase leading to the first floor has been found and Marshall attributed it to the possibility that these would have been made of wood and hence perished. If we examine the plan carefully, it seems that there were two kinds of rooms, one set of rooms around the open court and the other along the streets and lanes. Marshall has conjectured that the rooms along the streets were possibly shops, however considering that almost nine rooms in House K are built along the streets, such an interpretation seems improbable. Further what could have aided in ascertaining the functions of different rooms was detailed information on artefacts recovered from individual rooms, which unfortunately is not known. In Court 1, two soak-wells for the disposal of sewage have been identified. One of the soak-wells was built of limestone and calcrete, and the other of terracotta rings. A third soak-well was found in Room 15 which had a platform on the western side of the room. Marshall

(1951: 97) has suggested that Room 15 may have functioned as a bathing or washing area. In the case of House H too, at least two courts have been identified apart from nearly twenty three rooms on the ground floor. Three soak-wells have been found, of which two were located in the courtyards and the third in a room. A careful examination of the plan shows that House H may, after its original construction, have been divided into two houses with a continuous north-south wall running across the middle of this House H. This would have resulted in the western half with nine rooms and the eastern with fourteen rooms along with one courtyard in each section.

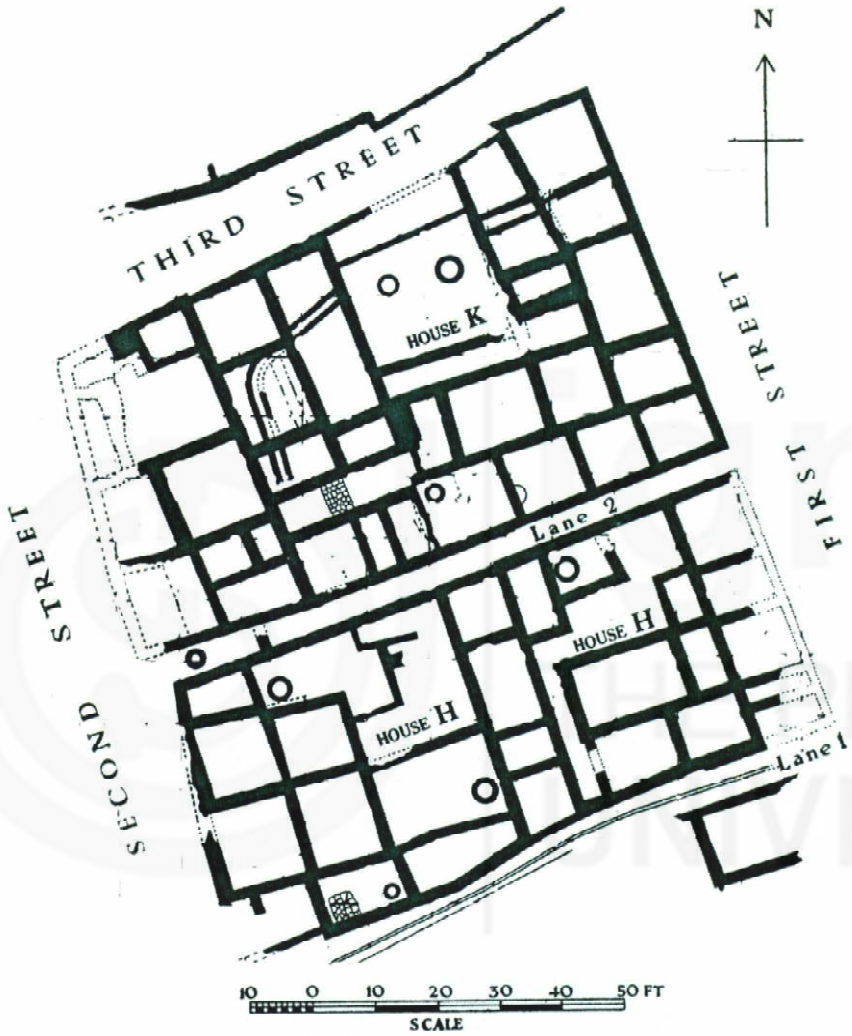

Figure 14.6: Plan of Houses at Bhir Mound [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 8]

The courtyards usually paved with cobble-stones were generally located in those parts of the house that had direct access to streets and lanes (see Fi**gures 14.4-14.6**). This would perhaps indicate that it was these courtyards which were the most public spaces within houses. Some of the other parts of the house that had stone paved floors were the bathing/washing areas and open passages. The rooms, on the other hand, tended to have floors of *bajri* rammed in with mud or just beaten earth. While the rooms around the courtyards, would have got adequate light and air, those rooms along the streets and lanes, had narrow slits (see **Figure 14.7**). Thus people walking along streets and lanes of this city would have encountered blank house walls. The houses were generally built of rubble masonry and the outer as well as the inner surfaces had coatings of thick mud plaster, either plain or white washed. No wells either public or private have been found within the settlement; hence the residents would have obtained water either from the Tamra stream or perhaps have sunk wells in the low lying areas outside the settlement.

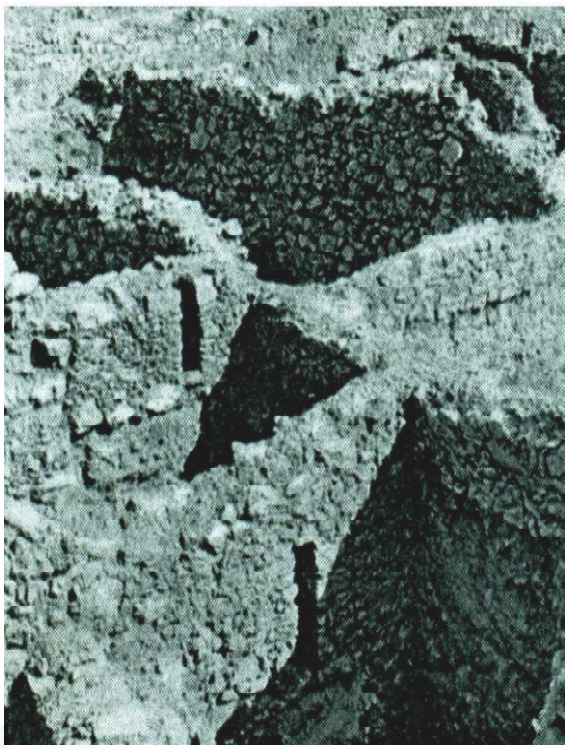

Figure 14.7: Narrow Slits in the Houses at Bhir Mound [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 6a]

14.5.2 The Parthian City at Sirkap

At the beginning of second century BCE, the Bactrian Greeks decided to build a new city across the Tamra stream, northeast of the Bhir Mound (see **Figure 14.1**). However as this city was never excavated, we have no information about it, just as practically nothing is known about the city built in about 100 BCE by the Shakas above the Bactrian Greek city. It is the Parthian city built around the early decades of the first century CE at Sirkap which was extensively excavated by Marshall. Moreover, Marshall chose to focus his excavation in the area marked by the main street and the houses that flanked it on either side of it.

Even though what drew Marshall to the Taxila valley was his interest in Greek archaeology, he decided to excavate largely the upper levels of Sirkap, which were coterminous with the Parthian city, rather than dig deeper to the lowest Bactrian Greek levels. He (Marshall, 1951: 120) has explained the reasons very succinctly.

> All too often I have seen, particularly in the Near East, the unfortunate results of removing stratum after stratum of structural remains before they have been adequately examined and properly understood. This is a common practice among excavators who are pressed for time and money and who are anxious, while they have the chance, to 'get to the bottom of things'. But there is really no use for a method of excavation which involves the destruction of what may eventually prove to be highly instructive data, before anyone else except the excavator has had a chance of examining them. In the case of Sirkap I am particularly glad that I decided from the start to resist to remove any part of these Parthian and Shaka remains until a substantial area of the city had been cleared and ample opportunities afforded to other archaeologists to study it.

There were several reasons for the selection of this new site by the Bactrian Greeks: extensive level ground surrounded by low hills and the presence of streams in close vicinity for a regular supply of water. The city at Sirkap too had a fortification but unlike at Bhir Mound, in this case the wall was built of stone and mud. While there may have been several gateways, the only one that was excavated was the one in the north. The location of the northern gateway was slightly to the east of the main street. If one entered from this gate, one could have walked down the main street with a grand view of the houses on both sides (see **Figures 14.8 and 14.9**).

Figure 14.8: Layout of Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 10]

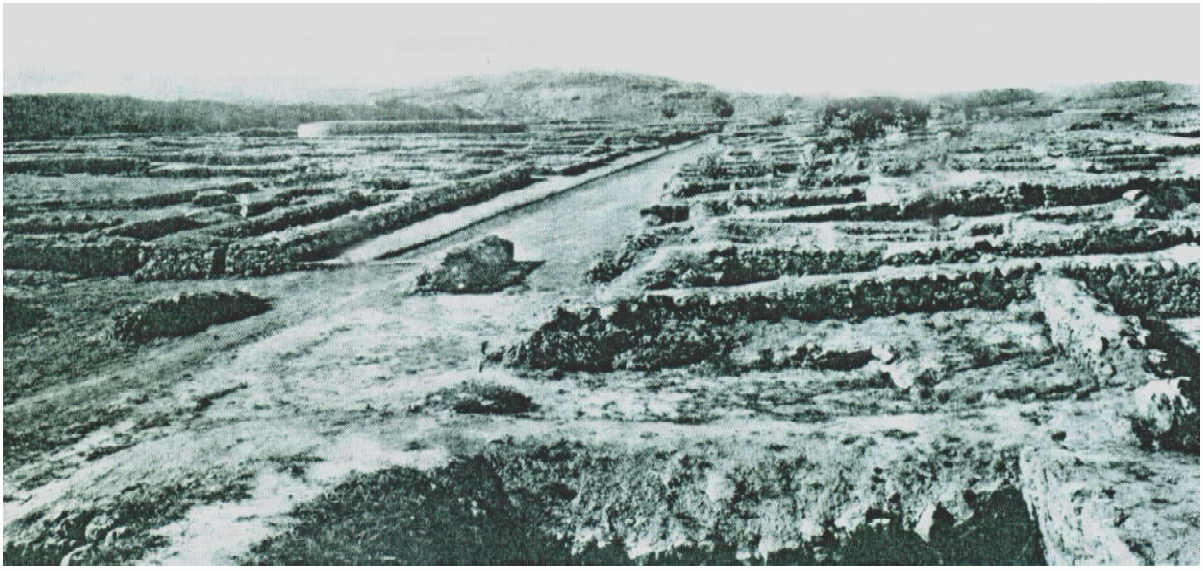

Figure 14.9: Main Street at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 22]

The overall layout of the city at Sirkap, as suggested by Marshall, was first conceived by the Bactrian Greeks and adhered to, both by the Shakas and the Parthians. The fortifications and the locations of the main streets, with their blocks of buildings, would have persisted throughout the occupational history of Sirkap. However, what would have changed over time would have been the lengths and orientations of the side streets as well as the internal plans of houses within the blocks (see **Figures 14.10 and 14.11**).

This city was quite different from the one at Bhir Mound in several ways. First of all, it was planned with parallel streets dividing the city into clearly identifiable blocks. The second was the complete absence of soak-wells and public bins. Could it be that individual households were responsible for the disposal of their refuse? Thirdly, the plans of houses and the locations of courtyards within them were different. Fourth, along with the continuation of the earlier rubble masonry a new and more stable type of 'diaper'[1] masonry for house construction was evident. This essentially comprised the use of dressed limestone blocks and filling the interstices with small limestone or calcrete pieces (see **Figures 14.12-14.14**). Fifth, while at Bhir Mound only mud plaster was used for both the outer as well as the inner surfaces of house walls, lime plaster was noticed on the outer walls and mud plaster on the inner walls of the hoses in the Parthian city at Sirkap. The plastered walls in turn had a coat of either lime whitewash or colour wash, the latter at times involving decorative patterns in multiple colours. At the same time, what remains common between the Mauryan city at Bhir Mound and that of the Parthians at Sirkap are the blocks of buildings with fuzzy boundaries between houses. Other common elements were the persistence of mud floors for rooms and stone paved floors for the courtyards.

[1] It is a masonry technique of placing different sizes of stones – a combination of boulders and smaller stones that differentiate early and later phases.

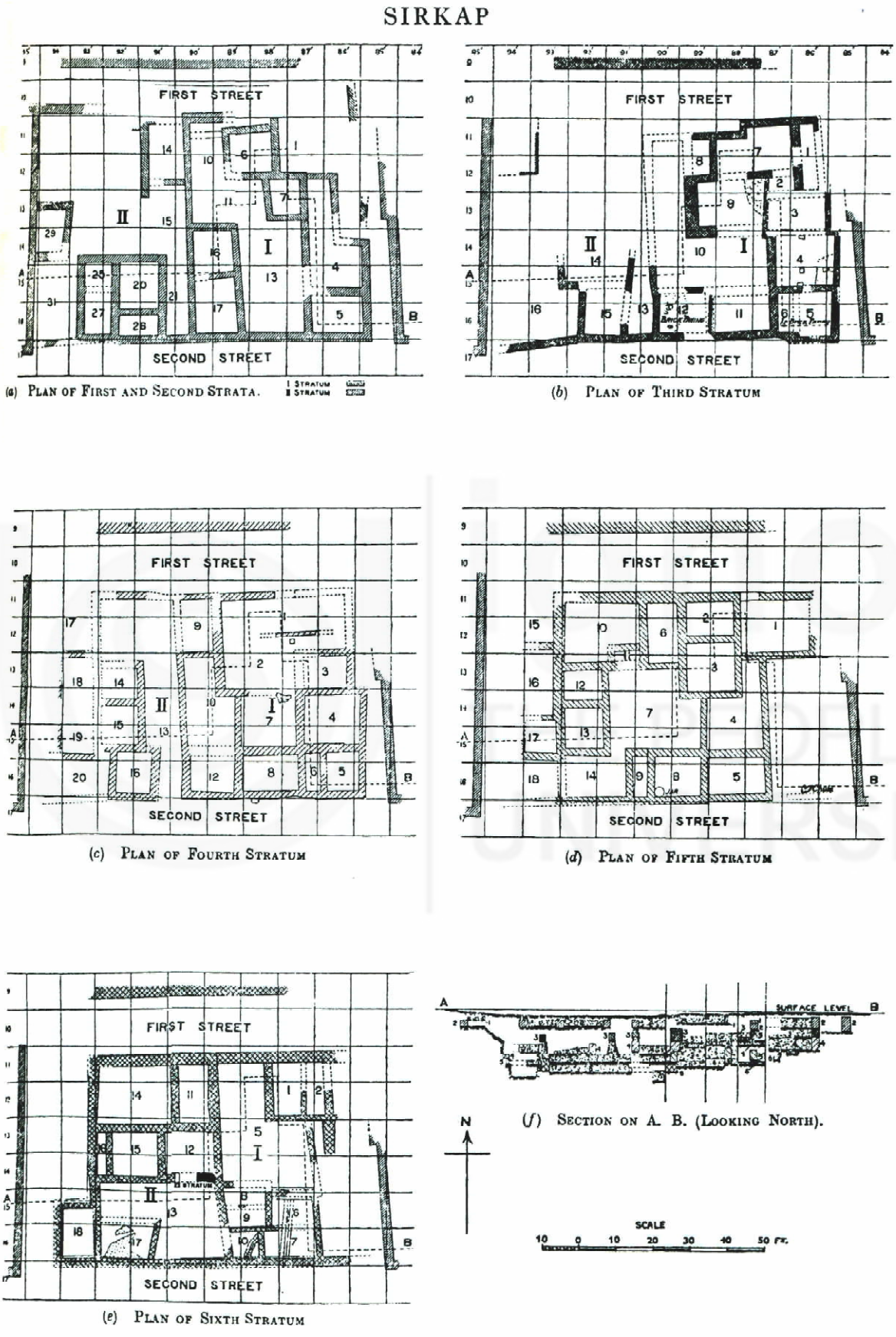

Figure 14.10: Internal Plans of House 2 in Block I' over Successive Building Phases at Sirkap [After Hargreaves, 1933: Plate XVI]

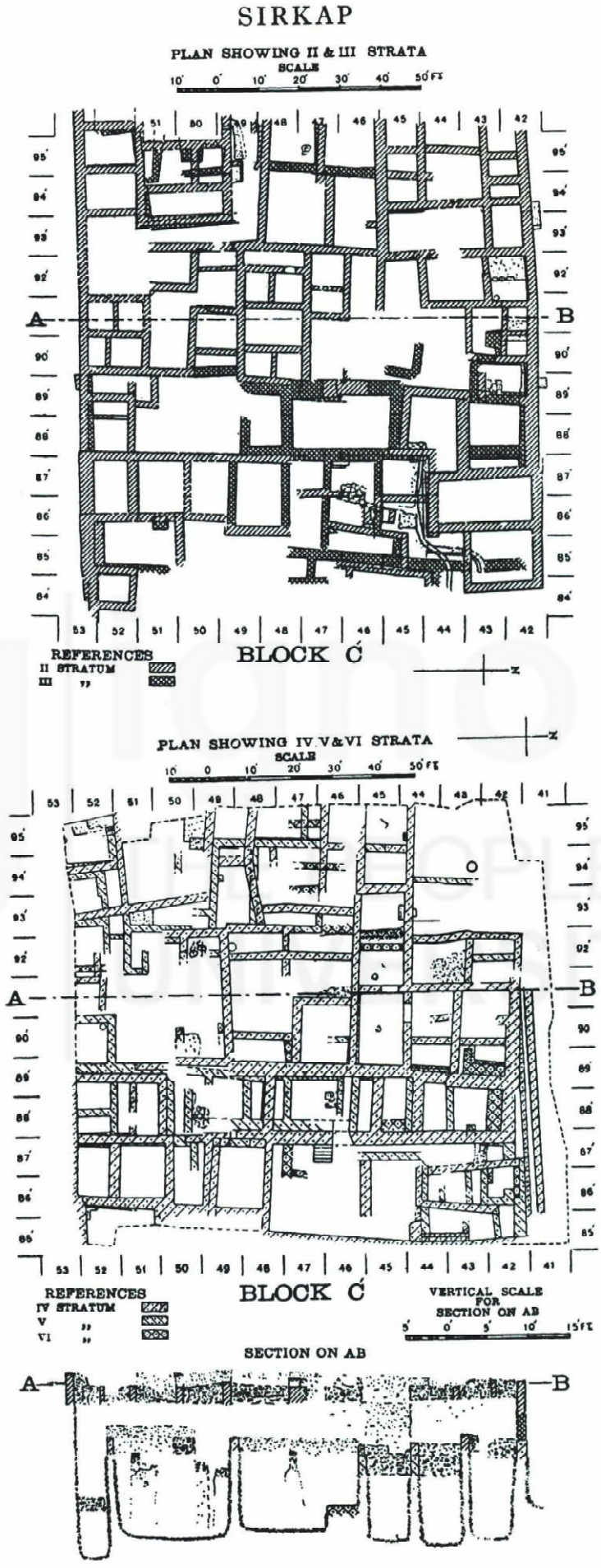

Figure 14.11: Internal Plans of Block C' over Successive Building Phases at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 18]

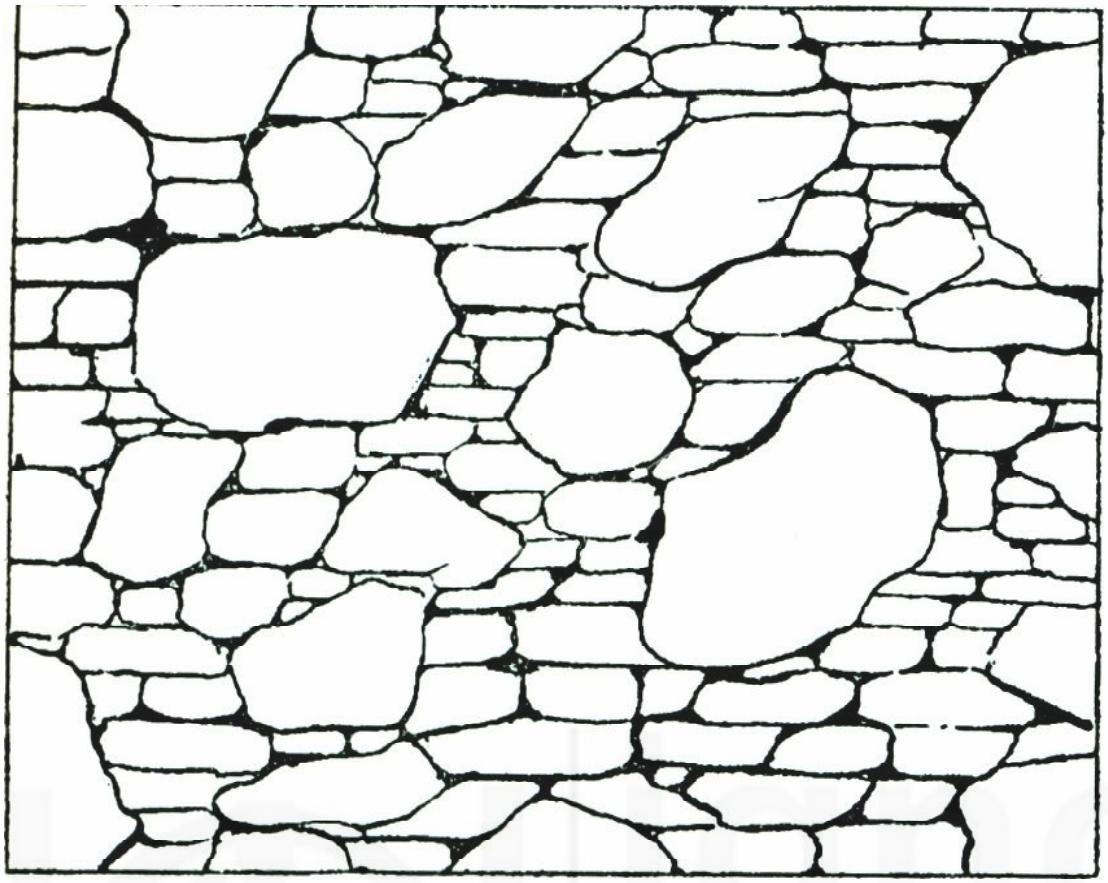

Figure 14.12: Early Phase of Diaper Masonry [After Marshall, 1916: Figure 1]

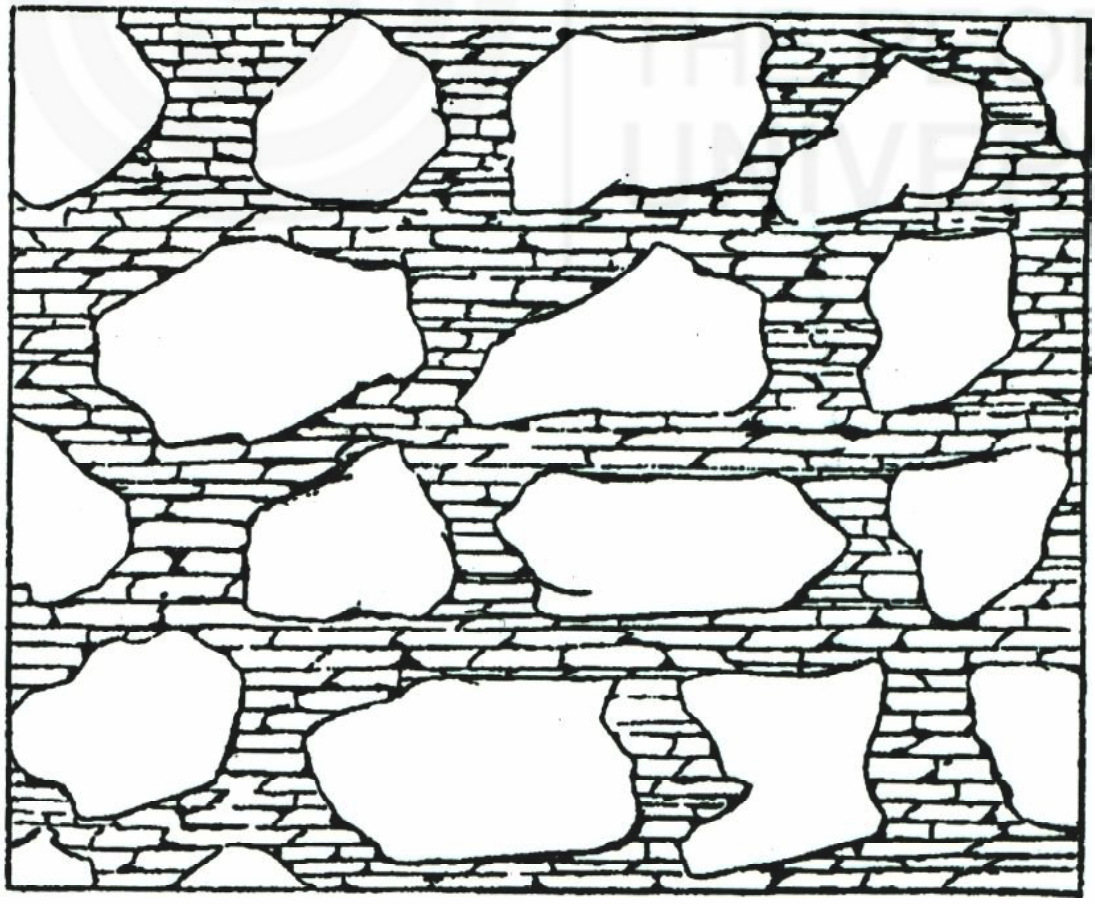

Figure 14.13: Late Phase of Diaper Masonry [After Marshall, 1916: Figure 1]

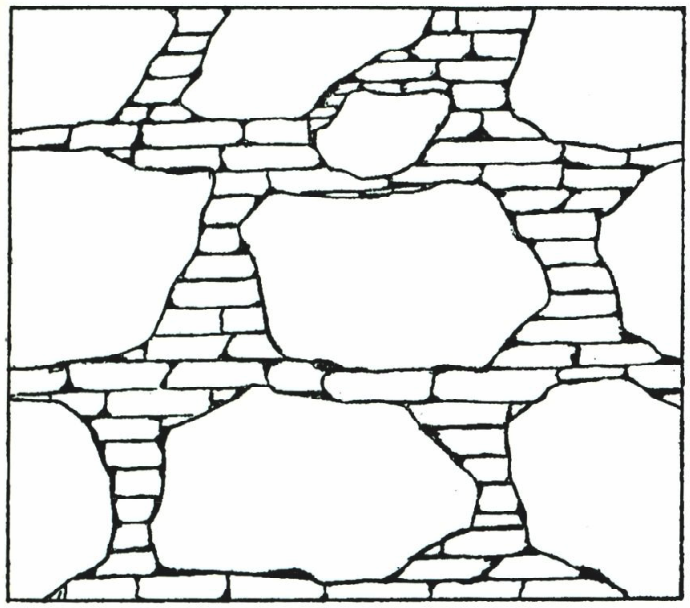

Figure 14.14: Late Variation of Diaper Masonry [After Marshall, 1916: Figure 1]

Marshall (1951: 198-199) has suggested that a devastating earthquake in about 20 or 30 CE ruined the city after which the Parthians built a new urban centre. They seemed to have employed several methods to offset the danger from earthquakes. One was to introduce a method of construction already in use further up the Indus, which is described by Marshall as 'diaper' masonry. The second was to make deeper foundations as compared to those in the earlier cities. The third was to have the lowest floor of the house as below ground level, in other words, to almost form a basement, followed by the next floor. This would have provided greater stability to the house.

Generally, houses at Sirkap of the Parthian period appear to have had several courtyards and a large number of rooms usually dispersed around the courtyards (see **Figure 14.8**). Many had double rows of small rooms in front bordering the main street. The courtyards could be small or large, but what is interesting is that their location within houses is different from those in the Mauryan city at Bhir Mound. In the latter, as has been mentioned earlier, the courtyards usually had direct access to the street or lane making them the most publicly accessible spaces. On the other hand, the Parthian houses at Sirkap, had courtyards which were much more private in terms of access from the street or lane. The location of the courtyard is, thus, an important indicator of the social and political differences that would have existed in the Mauryan city of Bhir Mound and that of the Parthian at Sirkap. The semi-public access of the courtyard of houses at Bhir Mound suggests a more open society and perhaps politically a more stable environment, as compared to the later Parthian period.

Just as at Bhir Mound, the Parthian houses within individual blocks at Sirkap are not easily distinguishable. For example, initially within Block H, Marshall (1951: 169-170) identified seven units, each of which could have functioned as a separate house. Later he retracted and felt that the block actually comprised of two complete houses and part of a third. The first house comprised of Unit I, the second of Units II to V and the third of Units VI and VII. However, a close study of the plan (see **Figure 14.15**) indicates that what has been labelled as Unit I possibly comprised of three separate houses with party or shared walls between them. Further to the east, what he has called the second house actually comprised of four houses, each with their own walls. This is also the case with the third house, which in fact are two separate houses, each with their own walls. In other words, there are nine separate houses of unequal sizes in this Block H.

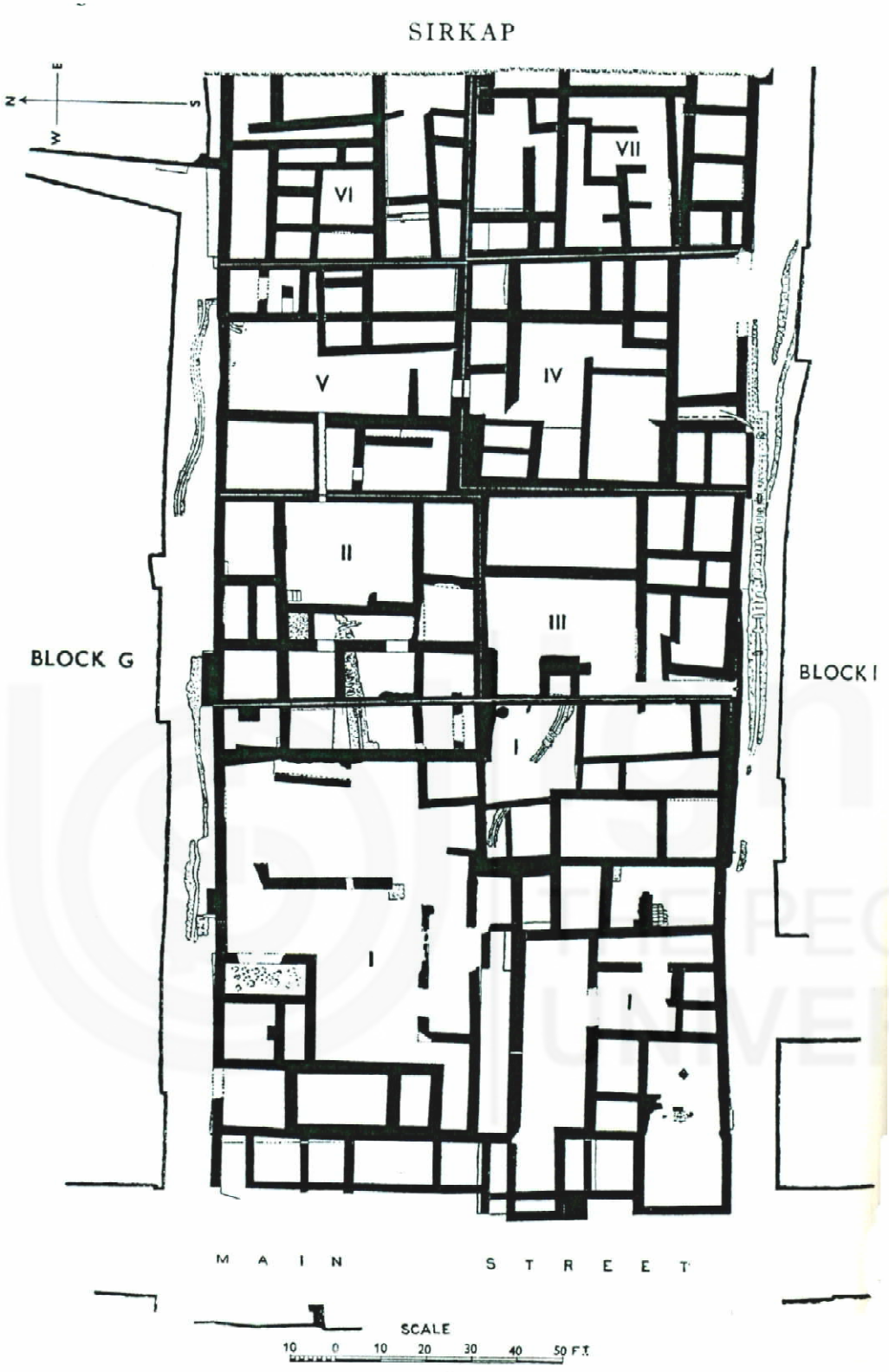

Figure 14.15: Plan of Block H at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1930: Plate XXV]

To get an idea of the sort of houses that we find in the Parthian city at Sirkap, we can look at House 1E (see **Figure 14.16**). The plan indicates a building with over sixty rooms and four courtyards. While there is a double row of fourteen rooms in the front of the house, the rest of the rooms are located around the four courtyards. The principal courtyard labelled as 'b' (see **Figure 14.16**) has rooms of various sizes on all four sides. As Marshall described (1951: 157-58):

This court which has the appearance of a complete house by itself, was constructed after the earthquake on the ruins of the older edifice and is a good example of the practice then adopted of building a house within a house…The object of designing it as a virtually detached unit in relation to the rest of the house, and providing, as far as possible, a clear space round about it, was evidently twofold: on the one hand, to eliminate the danger of adjacent buildings collapsing onto it; on the other, to permit of the insertion of windows in its outer walls without risk of the rooms being overlooked from the public streets.

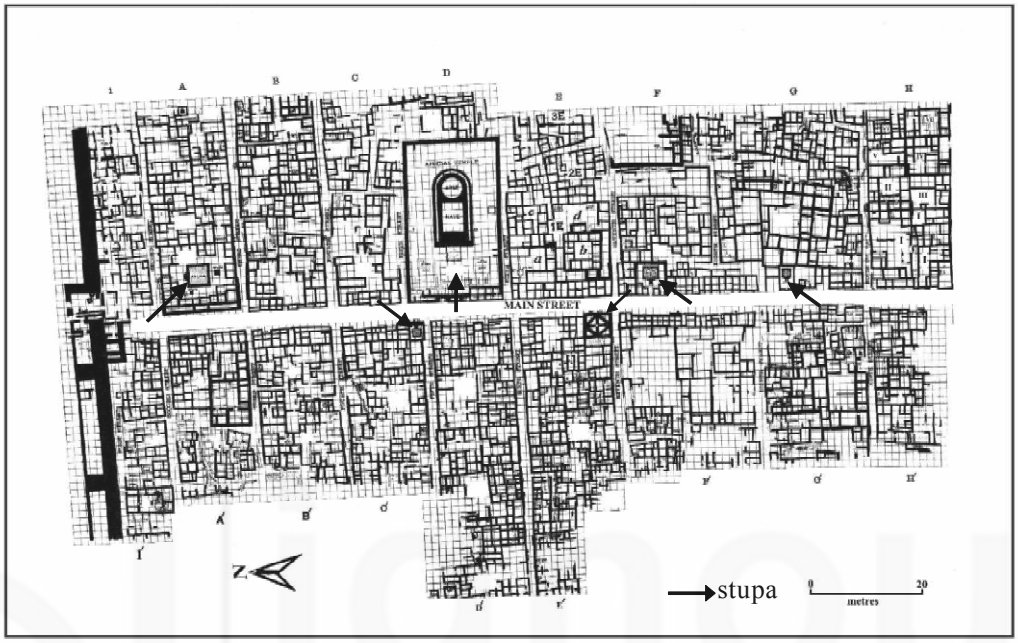

Figure 14.16: Plan of House 1E at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 24]

Another feature, which is perhaps unique to Sirkap, is the location of a small stupa towards the front side of a house (see **Figure 14.16**). In the case of House 1E, too, we find a small stupa in the northwestern corner (see **Figure 14.17**). Marshall (1951: 158) suggested that this must have been one of the oldest stupas in the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent, dating to the latter half of the first century BCE. The other interesting point made by him was that this stupa was older than the rest of the house, which was rebuilt after an earthquake. It appears that when the house was rebuilt, the level of the house was higher than that of the stupa. A shallow basin was constructed around its plinth in order to preserve it and to view it, as it continued to be 'an object of special veneration'. The stupa was decorated with acanthus foliage pointing downwards 'modelled in thick lime plaster and painted' (see **Figures 14.17 and 14.18**).

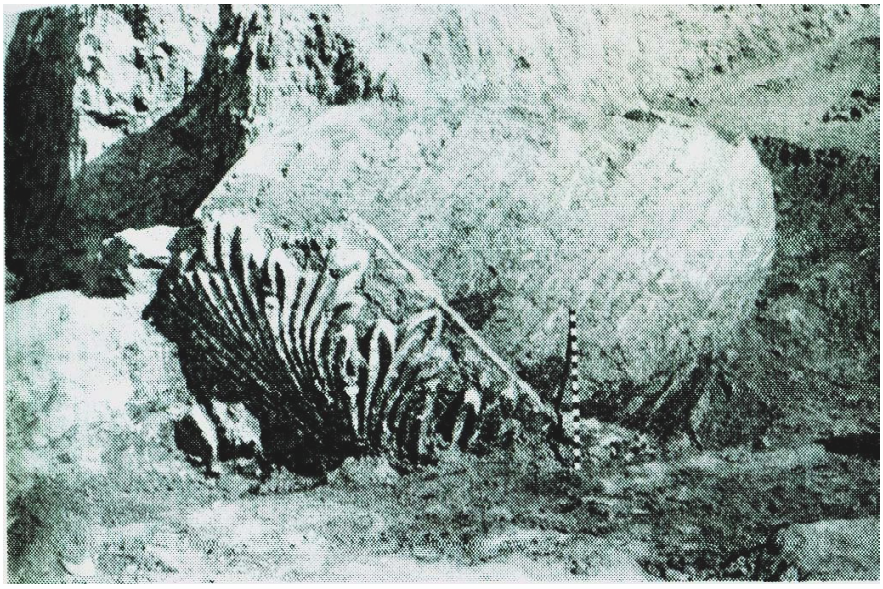

Figure 14.17: Fallen Stupa in Block E at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1916: Plate XXVa]

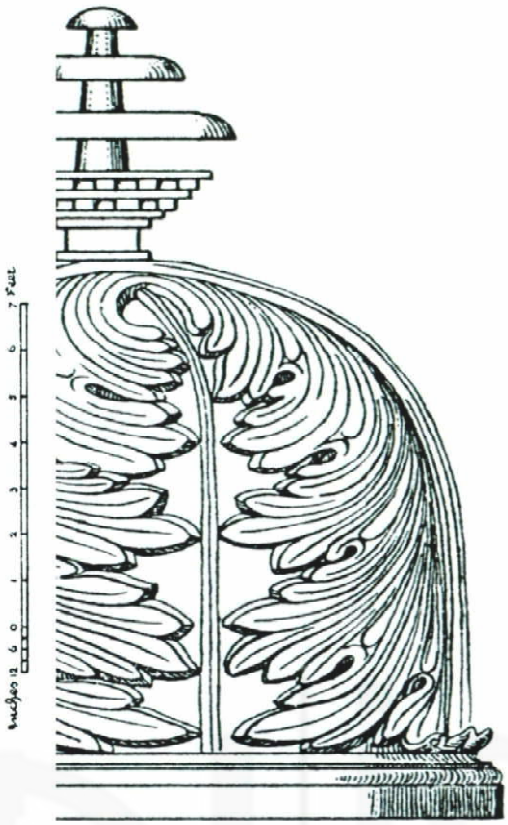

Figure 14.18: Drawing of the Stupa in Block E at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 120A]

Among the artefacts found from this house, Marshall (1951: 159-161) referred to a bronze statuette which was recovered from under the floor of a room at the southwest corner of Court 'b'. This statuette was of the Egyptian child-god, Harpocrates (see **Figure 14.19**), which he suggested may have come from Alexandria, the main centre for the cult of this god. Other finds from this house were in the form of two hoards of two different periods. One hoard was in a small earthenware pot closed at the top with a round metal cover. This cover was made of two plates, one of silver and the other of iron, held together by silver nails. Inside this pot were found the head of Dionysus or Silenius in silver; a silver spoon; a pair of gold ear-pendants; another gold pendant; earring of gold wire; another pair of gold earrings; six necklace pendants of gold sheet on cores of green jasper and turquoise paste; a gold necklace of sixty hollow spherical beads; a gold neck-chain; seven spacer beads of gold, inlaid with paste; two hollow club-shaped gold pendants; four hollow gold bangles; a gold locket; two box-settings of gold; a gold and carnelian finger-ring; a solid gold finger ring with oval bezel on which there is a *nandipada* symbol along with a Kharoshthi legend, *Sadhalasa*; another gold finger ring with legends in Kharoshthi and Brahmi, reading *Mahayashaputrasa Manavasa*; a third solid gold finger ring with a flat rectangular bezel and lapis lazuli setting, which has been carved with the figure of a Greek warrior armed with spear and shield, along with an inscription in early Brahmi characters, reading *Samanavasa*. These inscriptions on the rings probably refer to the names of their owners. Marshall has dated this hoard to about 60 CE, around the time when the Kushans were beginning to advance towards Sirkap. Clearly, these valuables belonged to the residents of the house and were safely deposited in the hope that they would be able to retrieve them in better times, which did not happen. Thus, these were recovered nearly two thousand years later by archaeologists while they were excavating here.

Figure 14.19: Statuette of Harpocrates found in House 1E at Sirkap
[After Marshall, 1916: Plate XXf]

A group of valuables, of a slightly later period, was also recovered during the excavations of Block E. While courtyards (labelled as 'a', 'c', and 'd') and the rooms around them belong to the late Shaka-Parthian period, the house with courtyard 'b' may have been built during the earliest phase of the Kushana period. This hypothesis is constructed on the basis of a storage jar that was found in the cobble-paved courtyard 'b'. The storage jar was buried up to its neck in the paved floor. This floor was itself laid over the debris of the earlier Shaka-Parthian house with which the hoard described above was associated. In early societies, valuables were often kept in storage jars buried under floors; this seems a good example of such a practice. These valuables consisted of a gold figure of winged Aphrodite or Psyche; a circular gold medallion brooch; a gold necklace of seventy four pieces; nine oval intaglios of jacinth; oval carnelian intaglio; two oval glass intaglios; three garnets meant as inlays for gold bracelets; and pieces of turquoise paste and crystal intended for jewellery settings. What provide the date for the collection are twenty one silver coins belonging to the transitional period between Parthian and Kushana rule in this region.

There is one extraordinarily large building (13,375 square metres) that has been excavated, which is almost nine times the size of an average affluent house in Sirkap (see **Figure 14.20**). This building, labelled as 'Palace', abuts the main street, and is located towards the southern part of the excavated area, which would have been almost at the centre of the fortified city of Sirkap. It needs to be pointed out that this may be the only example of an excavated palace in the Early Historic period for the Indian subcontinent. This building comprised of rooms and courtyards, both of which are much larger than those in average houses. Architecturally, neither are there any distinct features that mark this structure as different from houses, nor are there any special adornments, but it is the walls of the 'Palace' that are much thicker. The other noteworthy aspect is the large open space to the west of the building across the street (see Figure 14.8), in contrast to the adjoining blocks of houses. The complex had three entrances, all of which were small. One entrance was from the Main Street, and two from the Thirteenth Street. Marshall (1951: 171-180) suggested that the one from Main Street

was for the king or for state occasions, while the entrances from the Thirteenth Street gave access to two large courts, which have been labelled by Marshall as 'Court of Private Audience' and the 'Court of Public Audience'. There are sets of rooms and courtyards to the north of this thick-walled structure, which were probably later additions. Abutting the eastern part of the Twelfth Street is a courtyard with a stupa, which has not survived except for a square plinth and a relic chamber in the centre. The chamber held a grey schist casket with a tiny relic bone wrapped in a thin covering of gold.

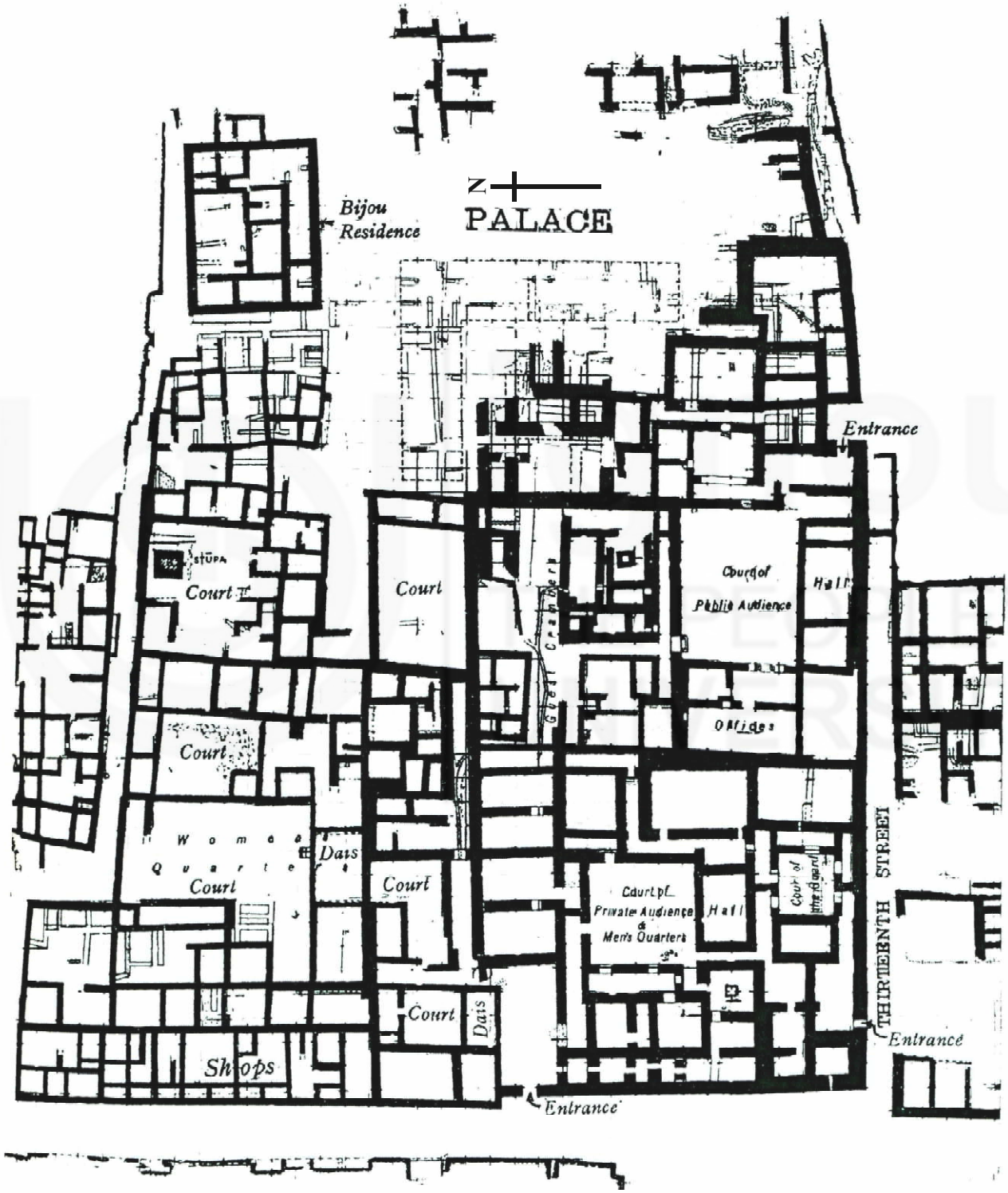

Figure 14.20: Plan of the 'Palace' at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 33]

The southern area of the fortified city of Sirkap was slightly elevated and small-scale excavations were undertaken here. These revealed a block of buildings labelled as 'Mahal' by Marshall (1951: 214-215). The buildings are on a similar scale as the palace described above and these too comprised of rooms and courtyards (see **Figure 14.21**).

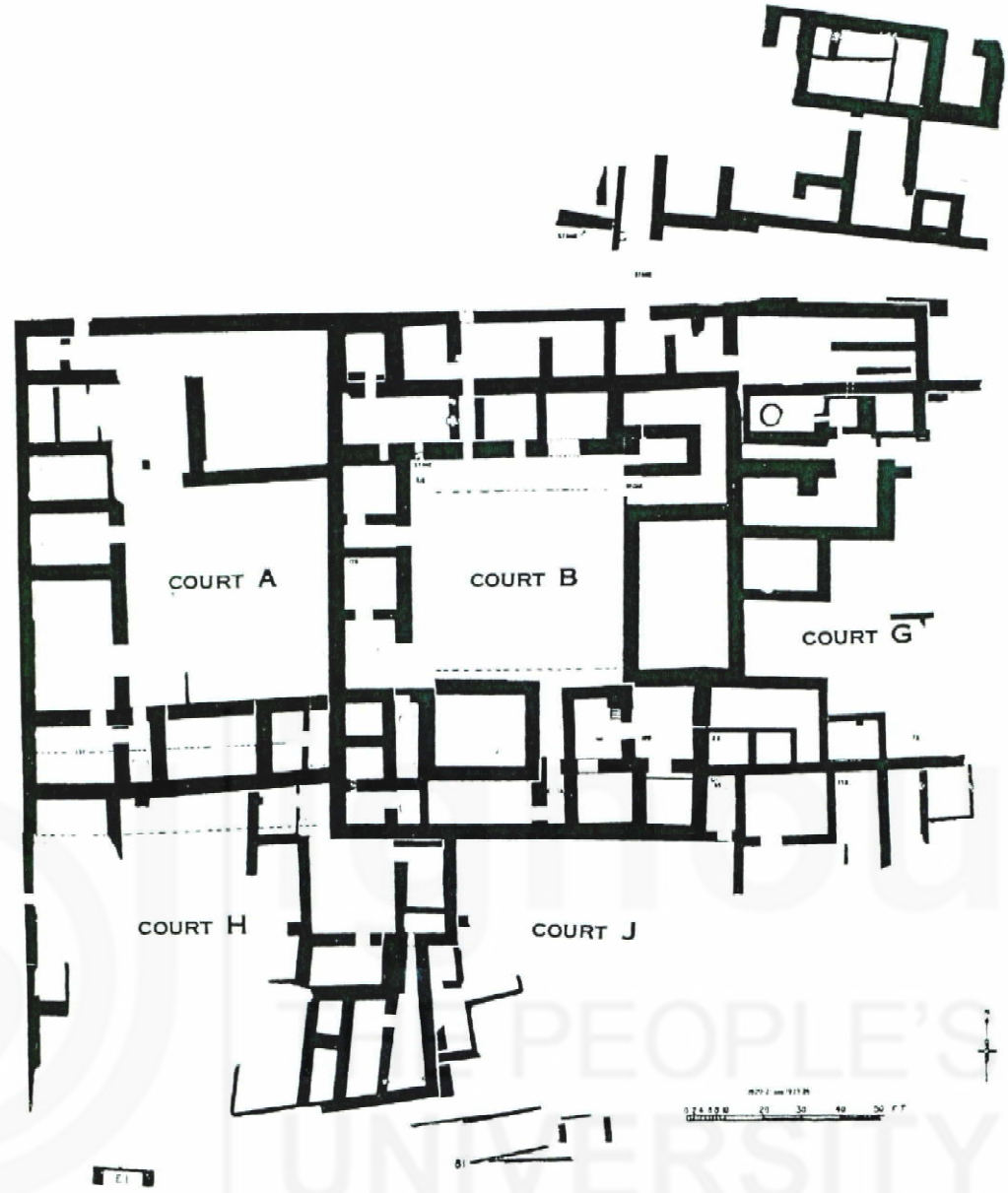

Figure 14.21: 'Mahal' at Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 39]

One unique feature of the settlement pattern at the Parthian city of Sirkap is the inclusion of a small courtyard with a stupa as part of houses in many blocks (see **Figure 14.8**). The access to these stupas seems to have been from the Main Street or side streets rather than from the house. It was pointed out earlier that in the case of Bhir Mound, the courtyard was a semi-public space. Here, at Sirkap, it seems to be these courtyards with stupas that functioned as spaces that could be accessed both by residents of the houses/block as well as by outsiders. Even the stupa in a courtyard in the Palace had access to the public from the Twelfth Street. Block A to the north had a stupa in the largest courtyard that has been excavated at Sirkap. In this courtyard, apart from the main stupa, there were three subsidiary stupas, one in the south and two in the northwest corner. In this same courtyard were also recovered three small votive stupas of calcrete; four copper bowl-shaped bells; a terracotta goldsmith's mould; a terracotta flesh-rubber; two terracotta ritual tanks; a stone saucer; a terracotta bell-shaped flask and a square terracotta tablet stamp. (Marshall, 1951: 142-145)

These individual stupas located within houses mark a form of worship that has not been encountered at any other site in the Indian subcontinent. What is even more perplexing is that these stupas could presumably be accessed by any passerby. While these stupas

enabled individual worship, by a resident of the houses within that block or an outsider, there was, however, also a place for larger congregation on the eastern side of the Main Street itself. Almost the entire space between the Fifth and Sixth Streets is taken up by an 'apsidal temple of the Buddhists or Griha Stupa', in Block D (see **Figure 14.22**). The courtyard occupied an area of 2870 square metres and was raised on a platform about 1.4 metres above the level of the street. The platform was composed of ruins of the late Shaka buildings and thus the structure belonged to the Parthian period. Access to this apsidal structure was from the Main Street. Apart from the main apsidal structure there were two small stupas on either side near the entrance. Like the other blocks, there was a double row of rooms along the Main Street. In the southern part of the courtyard was a square reservoir probably for washing of hands.

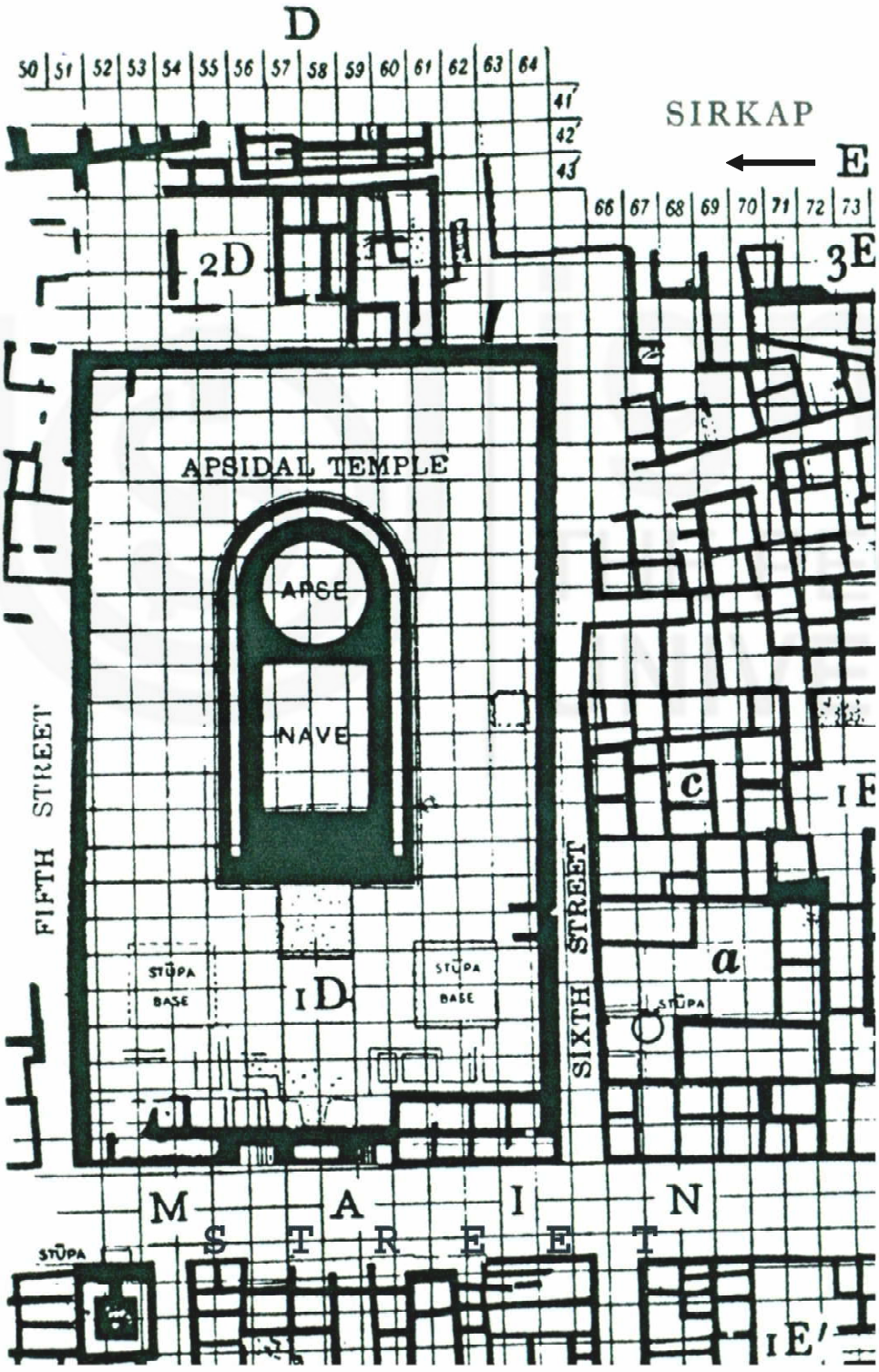

Figure 14.22: Apsidal Temple inside Sirkap [After Marshall, 1951: Plate 24]

14.5.3 The Kushan City at Sirsukh

Once again, a new city came up at the end of about 100 CE, this time by the Kushans across the Lundi stream. This was about 1.6 kilometres north-northeast from the northern wall of Sirkap and in size at 138 ha was almost double that of the Parthian city. It was enclosed by a fortification wall in the shape of an irregular rectangle (see **Figure 14.1**). The fortification was far stronger than that at Sirkap, being composed of heavy 'diaper' masonry. It was perhaps built by one of the early Kushan rulers, Vima Kadphises.

Sirsukh was excavated on a very limited scale, with mainly parts of a large building, comprising of rooms and courts, having been recovered (see **Figure 14.23**). While the foundations of the wall were constructed of limestone rubble, the walls that were above ground were faced with semi-ashlar masonry which began to be used from the second century CE onwards. This style of masonry comprised of alternating horizontal courses of squared ashlar and lines of boulders (see **Figure 14.24**). On the basis of the style of masonry as well as the other artefacts recovered, Marshall (1951: 219) has suggested this was built either in the late second century or early third century CE and was in use till about the fifth century CE. More extensive excavations were not pursued by Marshall for two reasons: one, because it was a low-lying area and under cultivation and second, because large parts of it were occupied by present day villages and graves.

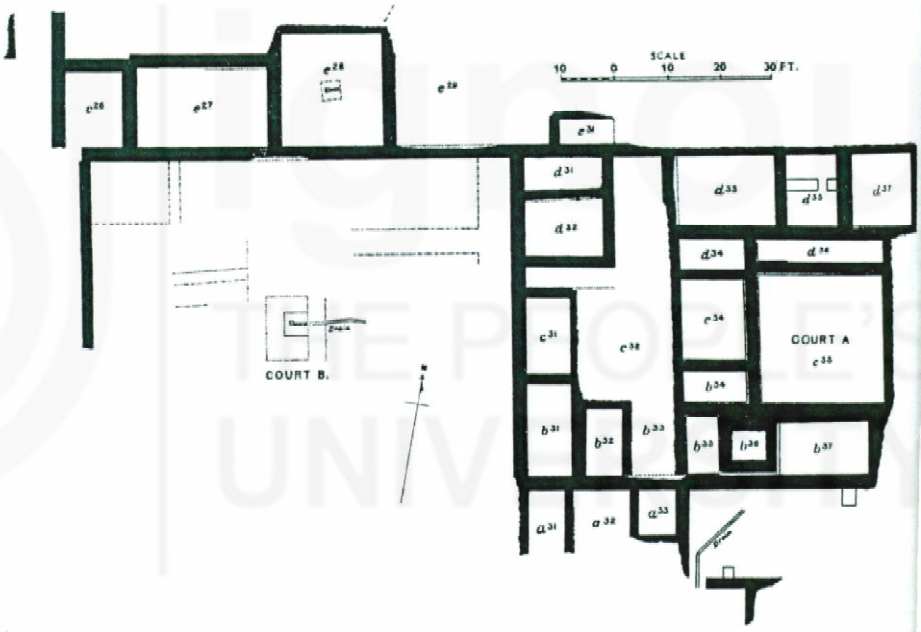

Figure 14.23: Plan of a Building at Sirsukh [After Marshall, 1918: Plate Xb]

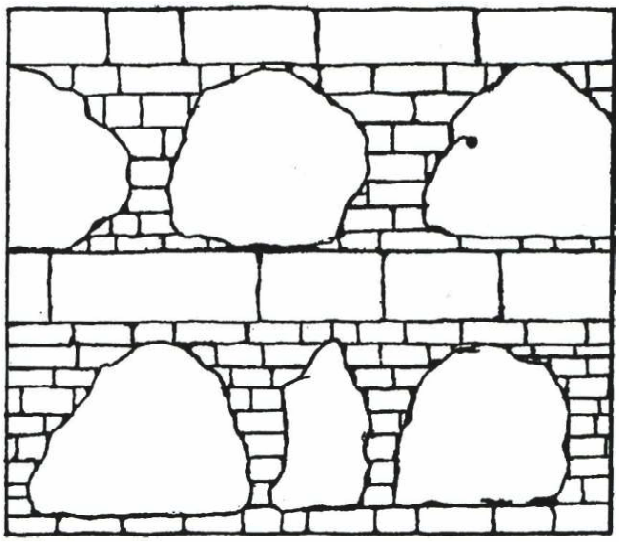

Figure 14.24: Semi-Ashlar Masonry Wall [After Marshall, 1916: Figure 1]

14.6 SACRED SPACES OUTSIDE CITIES

Apart from the numerous urban centres at Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh, the entire landscape of the Taxila valley encompassing an area of nearly 18 × 8 kilometres was marked by over 55 stupas, 28 monasteries, and 9 temples (see **Figure 14.1**). This micro-region was interspersed by three types of settlements: the cities, the religious establishments as well as villages, the latter which have not even been identified, though many small mounds have been located in the low-lying areas. None of these would have existed in isolation and instead would have been politically, socially, ritually and economically intertwined. These religious complexes show gradual architectural evolution, in the forms of both stupas and monasteries (Marshall, 1951: 222-397).

In some cases, these structures show clear Buddhist affiliation, like the Dharmarajika complex, which was perhaps first built during the Mauryan period with later additions continuing upto the Kushan period (see **Figure 14.25**). Similarly, there were many other Buddhist complexes at Khader Mohra, Akhauri, Kalawan, Giri, Kunal, Ghai, Mohra Moradu, Pippalla, Jaulian, Lalchak and Bhamala. While some of these date back to the Mauryan, those at Lalchak and Bhamala have been dated to the fourth-fifth centuries CE. Many of the surviving monasteries are affiliated with Buddhism and are of the quadrangular walled-in type, built of semi-ashlar masonry, which is a characteristic feature of both the Early and Late Kushan periods. Their plans, not surprisingly, follow that of houses with their courtyards and rooms (see **Figure 14.26**).

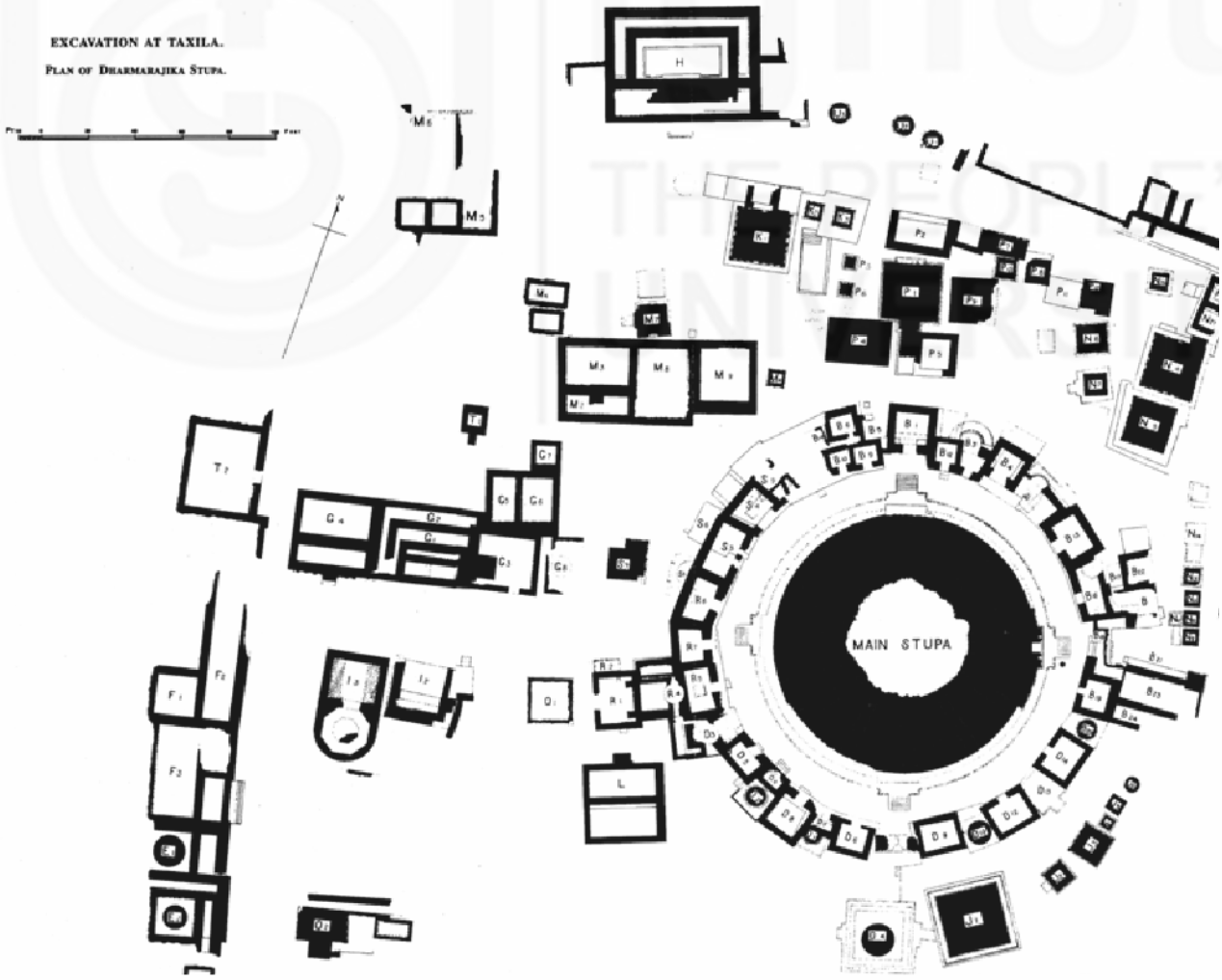

Figure 14.25: Plan of the Main Stupa at Dharmarajika [After Marshall, 1918: Plate I]

On the other hand, the evidence from the temple of Jandial is more ambiguous, as far as its chronology and its religious affiliation are concerned. (Marshall, 1951: 222-229) Marshall finally argued that it belonged to the period of the Bactrian Greeks (200-100 BCE), although he did not rule out that it may have been built by the Shakas in the first century BCE. The presence of Ionic pillars and pilasters, and the absence of Brahmanical, Buddhist or Jaina icons or relics, indicated to him that the temple was possibly built by the Bactrian Greek kings (see **Figure 14.27**). This may have also been the case with the shrine at Mohra Malliaran excavated by Cunningham.

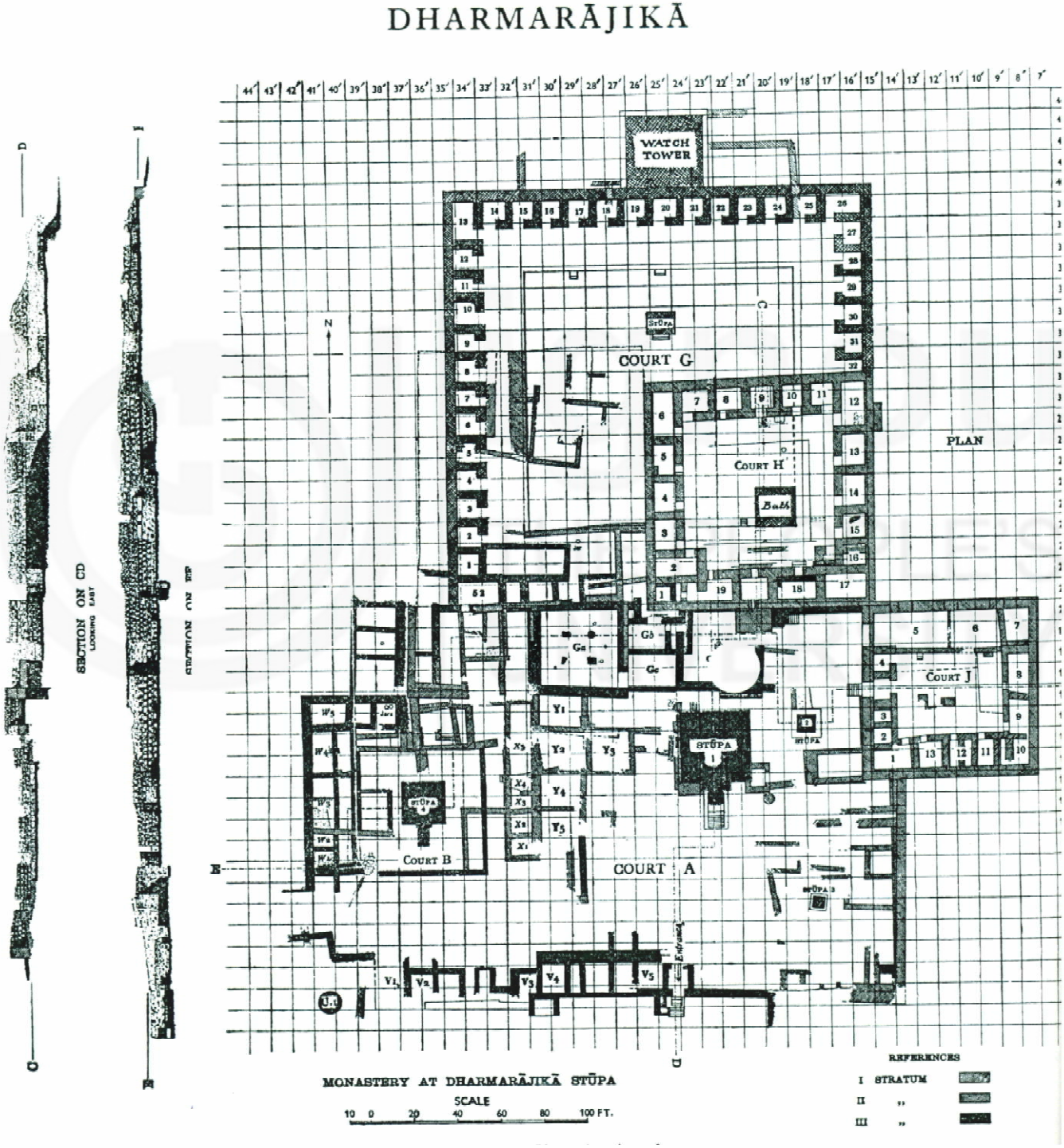

Figure 14.26: Plan of a Monastery at Dharmarajika [After Blakiston, 1937: Plate V]

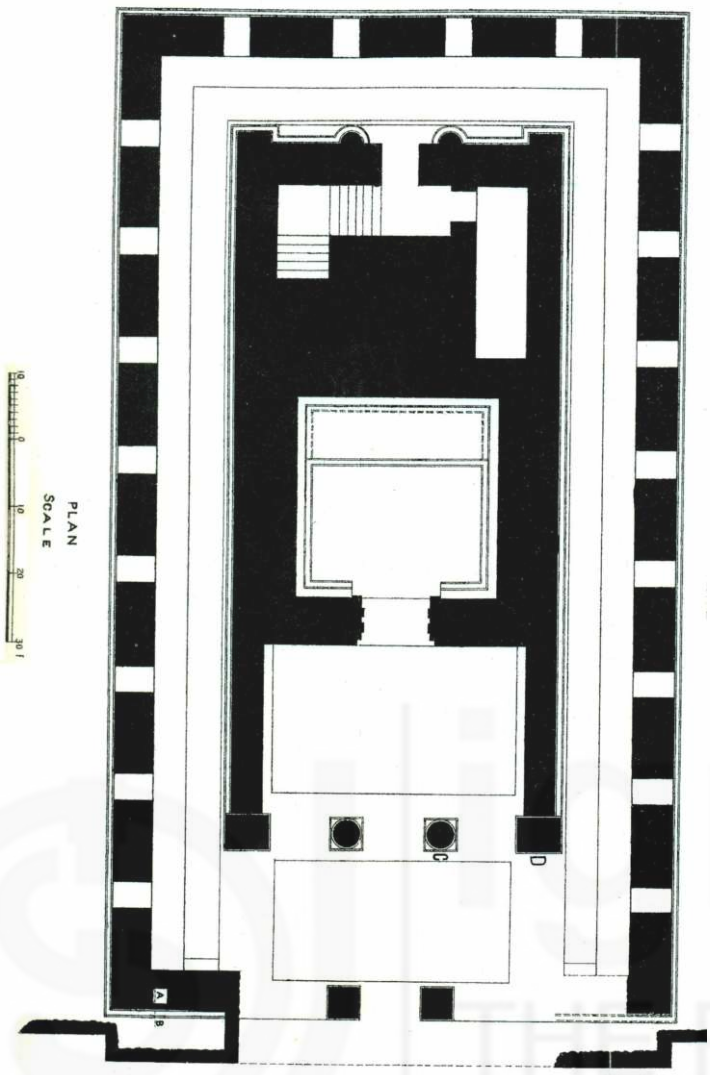

Figure 14.27: Plan of Temple at Jandial [After Marshall, 1916: Plate XXXIII]

The stupas found within the Parthian city at Sirkap were probably used and maintained by the residents of the houses in the blocks, in other words, the lay followers of Buddhism. Apart from the urban dwellers, there would have been a very large population of Buddhist monks who would have resided outside the cities in the monasteries that we see in the Taxila valley. What is interesting is that most of the Buddhist shrines and monasteries were located on hill tops rather than in the valley itself. There are also numerous small mounds identified in the low-lying areas in close vicinity of the streams and rivulets that may well have been rural settlements.

14.7 CITIES AT A CROSSROAD

As Marshall (1951: 1-2) wrote in the opening paragraph of his report on Taxila:

> [Taxila] was the meeting-place of three great trade-routes: one from Hindustan and Eastern India…the second from Western Asia…and the third from Kashmir and Central Asia…These three trade-routes, which carried the bulk of the traffic passing by land between India and Central and Western Asia, played an all-important part in the history of Taxila, for it was mainly to them that the city owed its initial existence as well as its subsequent prosperity and greatness and it was due to their diversion or decline, when trade contacts with foreign countries were interrupted, that Taxila sank eventually into insignificance.

Thus, for Marshall, the cities in the Taxila valley owed their origin and decline to the vicissitudes of trade between the Indian subcontinent, and West and Central Asia. On the other hand, Fussman attributed the importance of Taxila valley to political factors. For this reason he (1993: 92-95) saw the predominant Central Asian influence in those architectural practices that were more overtly political in nature. He has thus argued that the architectural styles of the fortifications at Sirkap, and much more so at Sirsukh were Central Asian in nature.

Fussman (1993: 95-96), however, found that the Parthian city at Sirkap with its density of houses and numerous rooms within individual houses was not at all like those in Central Asia, such as Ai Khanoum, Dil'berdzin or Dal'verzin Tepe. Even though the total area of many of the individual houses at Sirkap was similar to those at Ai Khanoum and Dal'verzinTepe, the latter houses had very large courtyards and far fewer rooms. For example, an Ai Khanoum house had a large court and only twelve rooms and the Dal'verzin Tepe house too had a large court with sixteen rooms. Moreover, at Ai Khanoum, the rooms lay on one side of the court (see **Figure 14.28**), unlike the Sirkap houses, where rooms lay on all four sides of a courtyard. Fussman saw the dense clusters of houses with their numerous rooms as a subcontinental feature. The chessboard planning of Sirkap, on the other hand, was derived from that of Greek cities. Thus, given the location of the Taxila valley, and the movement of people, armies, goods and ideas through this area, it is no surprise that the cities at Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh witnessed influences from a larger interconnected world of South, West and Central Asia in the Early Historic period.

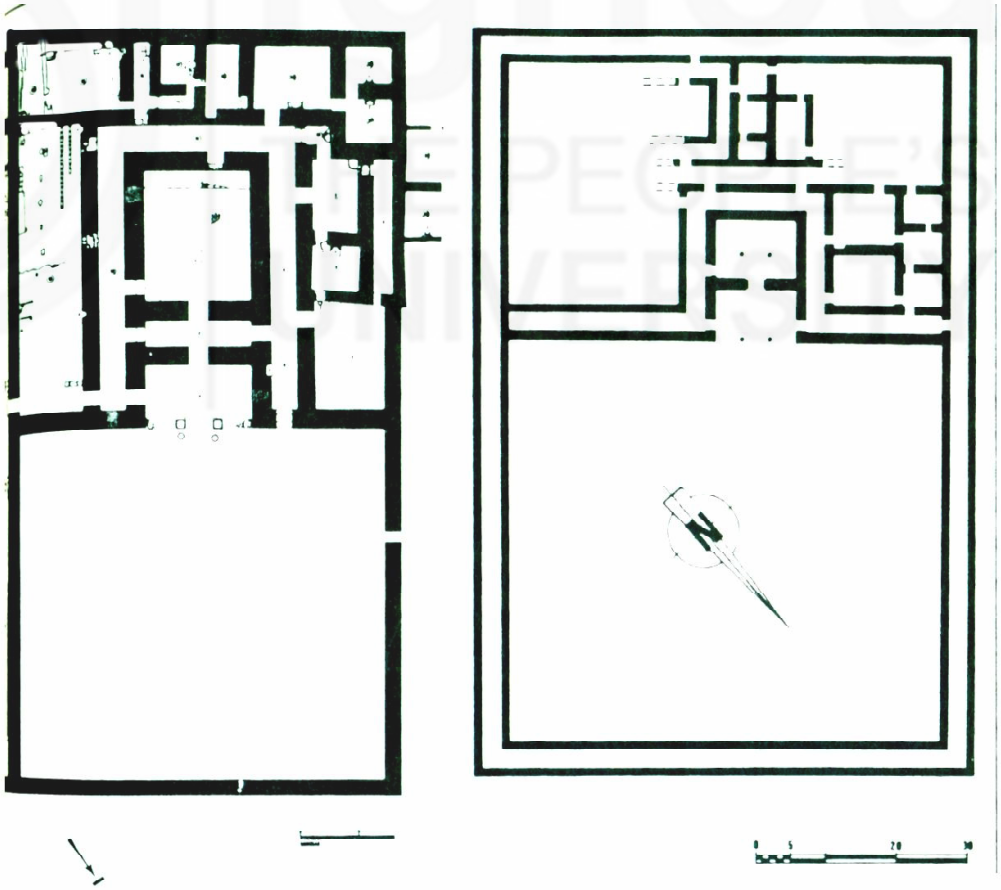

Figure 14.28: Plans of Houses at Ai Khanoum [After Fussman, 1993: Figure 7]

14.8 SUMMARY

The location of the Taxila valley played an important role in the emergence of successive urban centres at Bhir, Sirkap and Sirsukh from 500 BCE to 500 CE. It was a gateway to West Asia, Central Asia and the Gangetic plains. While human habitation in the Taxila valley began during the Mesolithic period, the earliest city in the valley emerged at Bhir Mound around 500 BCE, followed by the Bactrian Greek, Shaka, and Parthian cities at Sirkap and finally the Kushana city at Sirsukh. All the cities in the Taxila valley were characterized by a variety of fortifications. While Bhir Mound had fortification walls of mud brick and timber; at Sirkap and Sirsukh stone walls were built, although the masonry that was used at the latter city made the fortification far stronger than that at Sirkap. While at Bhir Mound the element of planning is largely absent in the Mauryan period; Parthian and Kushana cities were planned with parallel streets and blocks of houses. There were other differences as well between these cities. The Mauryan levels at Bhir Mound indicate that most side-streets and lanes were provided with open surface drains, but these did not connect to a larger drain in the main street. At Bhir Mound, there were also arrangements for the disposal of sewage and refuse, in the form of soak-wells and public bins. However no soak-wells or public bins were recovered from Sirkap. The house plans too, differed at Bhir Mound and Sirkap. At the former, the courtyards constituted the most public spaces within houses as they were directly accessible from the lanes. Many of the courtyards of the houses at Sirkap, however, had no direct access from the streets. A unique feature of some houses at Sirkap was the presence of a small courtyard with a stupa. It is also interesting to note that so far the only example of an excavated 'palace' in the Early Historic period in the subcontinent comes from Sirkap. Overall, the successive cities in the Taxila valley, owed their existence, largely to the vicissitudes of trade and polity.

14.9 EXERCISES

1) 'Taxila valley's geopolitical location played a crucial role in the emergence of Early Historic urban centres.' Comment.

2) Give a brief account of the explorations and excavations done in the Taxila valley. What are their limitations?

3) Compare and contrast Bhir Mound with Sirkap and Sirsukh cities of the Taxila valley.

4) Discuss the settlement pattern of the city at Sirkap built by the Parthians. What are the distinctive features of the 'Palace' complex?

5) Discuss the presence and placement of stupas in the city of Sirkap in the context of their relevance, importance and use.

6) Why were the sacred complexes built outside the cities of the Taxila valley? Examine their spatial spread and characteristics.

7) Point out the chief markers representing Central Asian and Greek influences in the Taxila valley.

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