

Excavation at Bet Dwarka

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The island of Bet Dwarka (22° 22' 12" N to 22° 28' 36" N and 69° 05' 03" E to 69° 09' 02" E), a narrow crooked strip of sand and rock about 13 km long lies 30 km North of Dwarka. It is famous for its temples and shrines dedicated to Lord Krishna, and is named Shankhodhar owing to its rich harvest of conch shells (*sankha*). Krishna's consorts Satyabhama and Jambavati are believed to have lived here. According to Umasankar Joshi a renowned scholar, *Antardvipa* mentioned in the *Sabha Parva* of the *Mahabharata* is to be identified with Sankhodhara. The epic says that the Yadavas went in boats from Dvaraka to Antardvipa to perform the festival of Mahadeva.

The Gulf of Kutch encircling the island is very shallow - 3 to 2 m deep between Okha and Bet Dwarka jetty. The tidal action is so severe that heavy erosion is taking place along the eastern as well as the southern coasts of the island with the result that what little remained of the submerged port of the mid-second millennium B. C. is being swallowed by the sea on the east coast. The early historic and medieval sites are disappearing fast on the southern side.

The excavation undertaken by Hirananda Shastry in the early thirties near the Nilakantha Mahadev Temple behind Dhingesvar Mahadev (*Fig. 1*) revealed an early historic settlement. A potsherd inscribed *Nandakasa* in Mauryan Brahmi script datable to 3rd century B. C. or slightly earlier was found by Shastry.

The onshore excavation by the Marine Archaeology Centre in 1981- 82 at the southern end of the eastern shore near

Dargah of Siddi Bawa followed by the off-shore explorations in 1984-85 brought to light a rubble wall of 1500 B. C. built in box-technique and yielded important antiquities including a Late Harappan type seal, an inscribed jar and a coppersmith's stone mould used for casting spearheads etc. A massive wall, 580 m in peripheral length, was discovered in the central sector. The northern sector at Balapur where the old customhouse stands yielded Late Harappan pottery in the lowest strata and post-Harappan, Early Historical and Medieval pottery in the upper terraces.

Two trenches dug in the intertidal zone had brought to light rejected columella and unworked conch shells in what appeared to be a highly eroded shell worker's house near the rocky escarpment of Balapur (BDK VI).

In 1991 a new site was found 750 m north of Balapur village not too far from BDK VI. The mound is 6 m high above the High Water Line and the habitation debris is just one metre thick.

Two trenches were laid on the mound. Trench No.1 is on the eastern side and Trench no. 2 on the western side of the mound, each trench being 10 x 10 m.

Results

Trench 1 :

Laid in lower terrace above the Intertidal Zone (IZ) Trench I was excavated to a depth of 70 cm and four layers were recognised. Layer 1 consisting of loose sandy yellow clay is 2 to 10 cm thick. Layer 2 also yellowish clay with stone pieces

yielded Late Harappan pottery. Layer 3 is 15 to 25 cm thick and consists of compact clay in which a floor of rammed kankar and lime was noticed. Layer 4 is reddish clay and no artefacts were found. The natural soil is at 75 cm below surface.

Trench 2 :

Trench 2 in the upper terrace also revealed four layers but yielded no pottery except from surface. In the Late Harappan times the habitation was heavily eroded and much of the habitation deposit was washed away.

Discussion

The excavation being extremely limited in area, antiquities were very few as there are clear signs of erosion. However a corroded copper object was found in layer 3. The pottery consists of red ware, the main types being bowls, jars, dishes and dish-on-stand comparable with the Rangpur IIC and III types. (Rao S.R. 1963 *Ancient India* No. 18-19)

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the Late Harappan and post Harappan settlements existed in BDK I - II and BDK VI, and these settlements extended to the northern and southern extremities of the eastern shore of Bet Dwarka. The Late Harappan pottery can be assigned to 1700-1500 B.C. and the post-Harappan Lustrous Red Ware to 500-1400 B.C. The latter represents the culture of the Mahabharata period.

Description of Pottery

Bowl :

1. Bowl with a thick rim and straight sides, slightly convex profile, well fired and medium fabric. BDK - IX-90 (compare with RGP IIB, type 29).
2. Bowl with a thick rim and straight

sides, well fired, coarse fabric, BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIB, type 29).

3. Convex sided bowl with a thick rim, red slip, well fired and fine fabric, BDK-IX-90 (Compare with RGP IIC, type 10a).
4. Bowl with a sharp and straight sided rim, thin section, medium fabric and ill fired. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIC, type 10a).
5. Convex sided bowl with a sharp rim, red slip, medium thickness, coarse fabric and ill-fired. BDK-IX-90 (RGP IIA, type 50).
6. Convex sided bowl with a thick rim, red slip, well fired and fine fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIC, type 10B).
7. Bowl with an incurved beveled rim, red slip, well fired and fine fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIB, type 62).
8. Convex sided bowl with a thick rim, red slip, a hole on the rim, well fired and fine fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIC, type 10b).
9. Bowl with a projected beaded rim and slightly convex sides, well fired, medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIB, type 23).
10. Bowl with an incurved sharp rim and convex sides, red slip, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP III, type 164).
11. Thick bowl with a flat rim and slightly convex sides, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP III, type 82).

Jar :

12. Thick storage jar with a raised neck, beaded rim and bulbous body, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIA, type 1).

13. Thick storage jar with a raised neck, flat topped and projected rim, well fired, medium fabric. BDK-IX-90.
14. High necked jar with a splayed out and beaded rim, ill-fired and coarse fabric. BDK-IX-90.
15. Jar of medium size with a raised neck and beaded rim, well fired, medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP III, type 70).
16. Jar with a splayed out projected rim, well fired and medium fabric, BDK-IX-90.
17. Jar with a beaded rim and raised neck, red slip, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP III, type 71).
18. Featureless and concave rim of a miniature vessel, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90.
19. Storage jar with a heavy beaded rim, thick section, ill fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90.

Dish

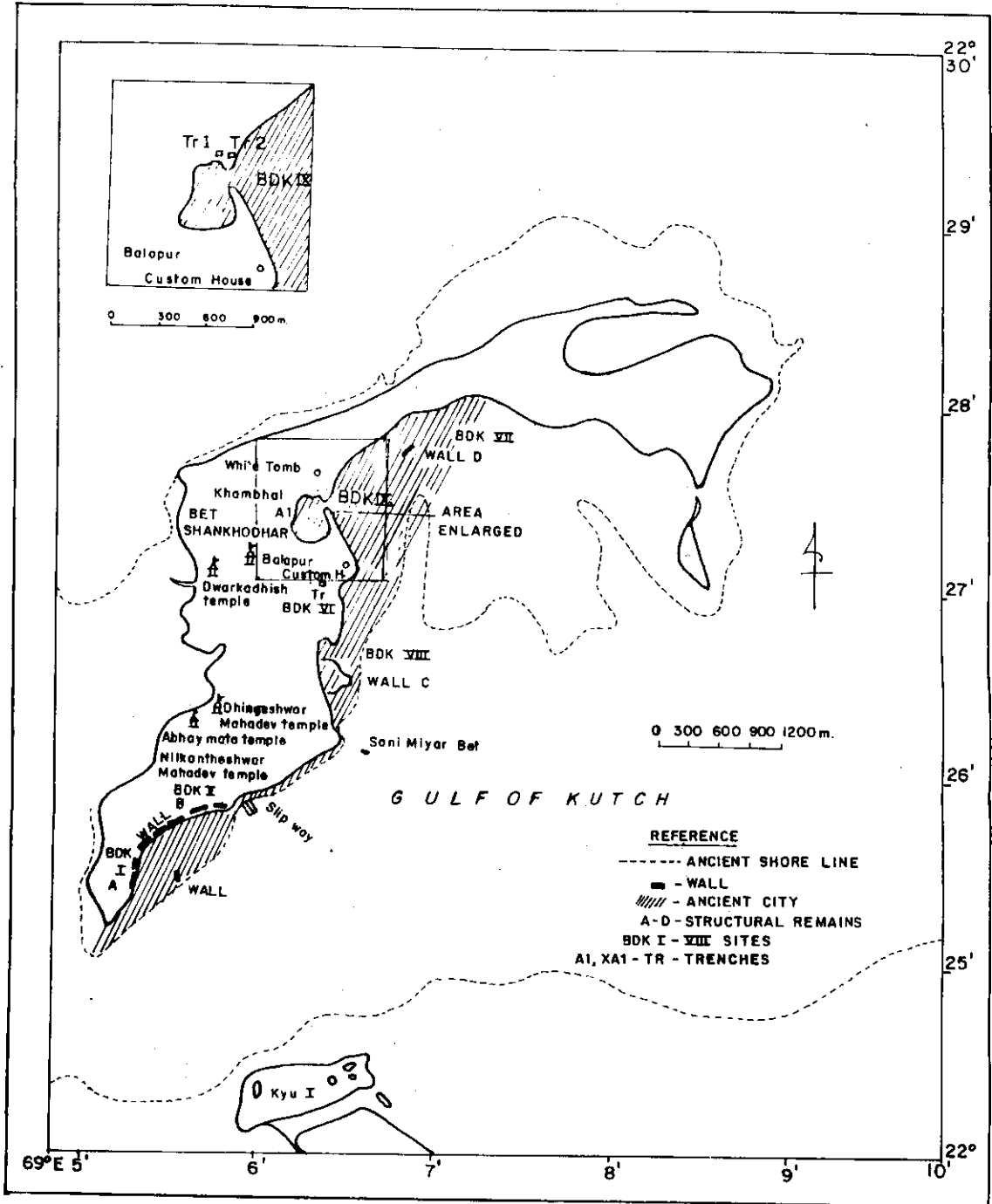
20. Dish with a projected sharpened rim, blunt-carinated shoulder, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIA, type 67a).
21. Dish with a flared and beaded rim, red slip, thick section, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90.
22. Shallow dish with a projected beaded rim, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90.

Dish-on-Stand

23. Base part of a dish-on-stand with a slightly raised edge on the base, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIA, type 72b).
24. Base of a dish-on-stand with a beaded edge, well fired and medium fabric. BDK-IX-90 (compare with RGP IIA, type 72a).

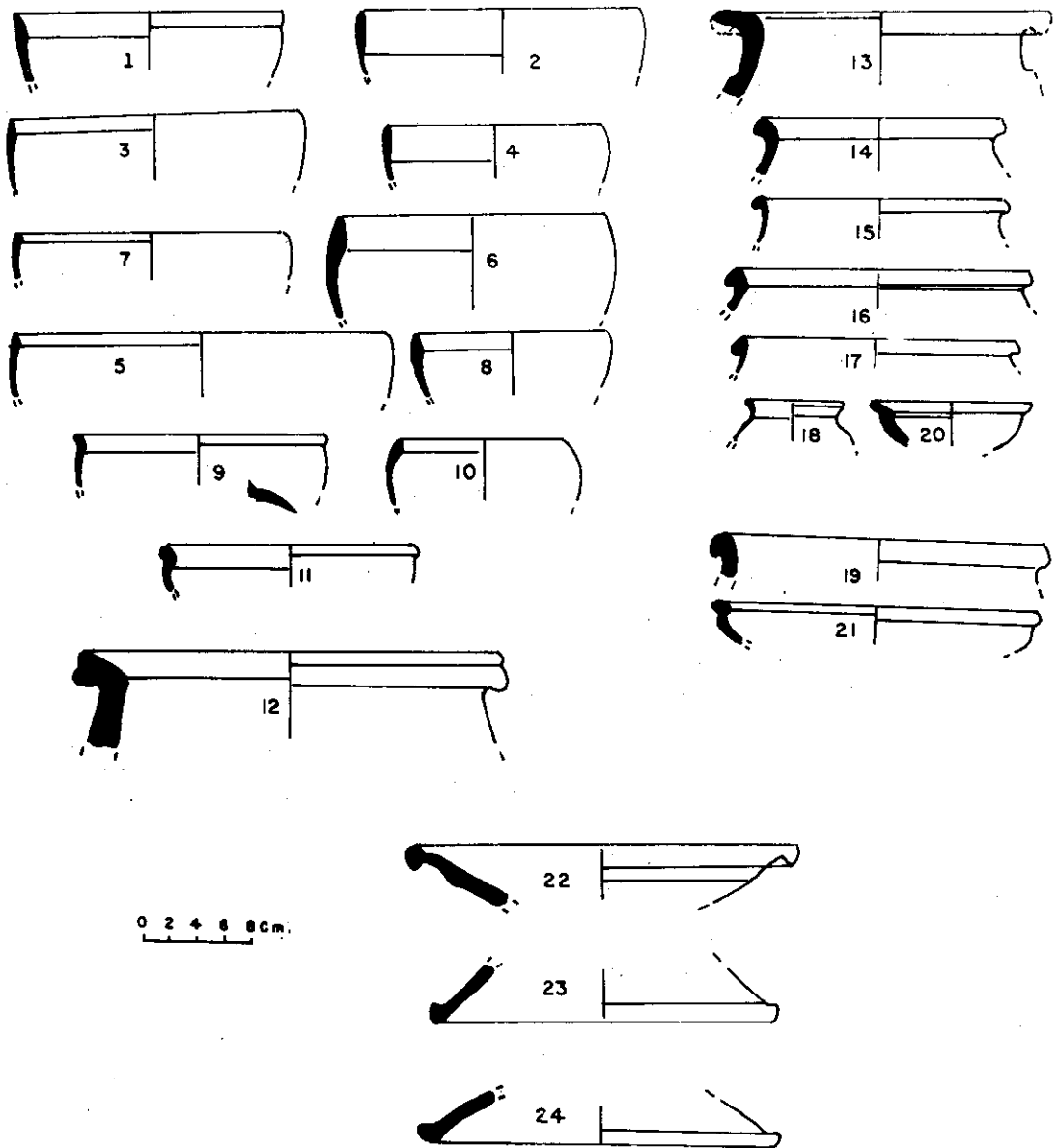
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Bet Dwaraka

POTTERY OF BET DWARKA



- Bowl - 1-11 Red ware
 Jar - 12-19 Red ware
 Dish - 20-22 Red ware
 Dish on stand - 23-24 Red ware



Fig. 3 : Trench 1 excavated in the terrace above intertidal zone at Bet Dwarka