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Archaeological Investigations in Hodal Area of District Palwal, Haryana: With Special Emphasis on the Ancient Site of Saundh

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Hodal is an ancient town situated on the borders of Mathura and Palwal districts (latter formerly part of Gurgāon and Faridabad districts) forming an administrative tehsil of Haryana province. Culturally, this whole area around Hodal is more or less part of the wide spread Braja culture zone and also partly forms part of Braja circuit of 84 kos. River Yamuna flows on the eastern boundary of Hodal tehsil and forms a dividing line between Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. This whole area surrounding Hodal was found to be very rich archaeologically with a number of settlements, of which few are quite extensive. Various important routes pass through this area of which the two most important ones are the route to Indraprastha from Mathura via Palwal (following more or less the National Highway No. 2) and route two Mewāt and further north areas from Mathura and also from trans-Yamuna area which goes via Kot, Utawar.

The present town of Hodal can be identified as Oṭalā or Oṭalā which finds mention in Buddhist text *Vinayavastu*. It mentions that Oṭalā and Bhadrāśva are the two centers in the Śūrasena region between which Mathura is situated (Dutta & Sharma 1947: 3). It also adds that the Buddha after visiting Mathura had moved to Oṭalā and from there to Vairambhā. Oṭalā might be identified with the modern town of Hodal, situated on the National Highway No. 2, 54 kilometers distant from Mathura in northern direction and Bhadrāśva with either

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Bhadar in District Mathura or Bhadas in Mewat district of Haryana. Following points favor the identification of Hodal with Ota: the local legend says that the original inhabitants of this place were known as Ota who were thrown away from here by the Jātas; it is situated on the ancient highway linking Takshaśilā with Mathura; the name Hodal does not make sense as such in any language except for it being a corrupt form of word Ota. Hodal is a sizeable mound of about 400 x 350 x 14 m dimension, on which part of the modern town inhabits. The site dates back to at least PGW period and continues in the succeeding periods of NBPW, Śūṅga, Kushāṇa, Gupta, and medieval periods up to modern times. Another nearby isolated mound (about 4 kilometers distant from Hodal) is locally called as Kachi-kherā which might be the changed name for the famous woman disciple of the Buddha-Kachangalā. The story of Kachangalā, who in some of the previous lives of the Buddha had served as his mother, has been discussed in the context of Ota (Dutta & Sharma 1947: 22). This site might have been situated at a distance from the main town. The nature of Kachi-kherā site is almost similar to Hodal in archaeological sequence, though it is an abandoned mound.

Sites Situated in and Around Hodal in Districts Palwal and Mewat Area of Haryana

Hodal is an important ancient town of the region. The nearby sites have been distributed for this study based on their location from the town of Hodal. Many of these sites would have been better studied if located nearby Punahna or Jurahra but since Mewat is not as such a part of the present paper, Hodal is being taken as an important site for their description. Most of these sites can be looked in the topo-sheet no. G43 F5 or 54 E/ 5.

Name of the Site	Location from Hodal	Dimension	Cultural Assemblage
Hodal	near Ramlila ground	400 x 350 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Bhulwana	near Hodal Rly. station	220 x 180 x 7 m	GW, BRW, RW
Karman	5 km southeast	260 x 230 x 13 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Hamid Khera	2 km south	450 x 300 x 7 m	GW, BRW, RW
Kachhi Khera	4 km southwest	340 x 320 x 12 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Nawalgarh	6 km southwest	200 x 180 x 9 m	RW
Bichhor	7 km southwest	280 x 250 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Nai	11 km southwest	280 x 250 x 12 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Hathangaon	14 km southwest	230 x 220 x 10 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Pai	18 km southwest	350 x 300 x 20 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Jurhari	20 km southwest	220 x 200 x 7 m	RW
Jurhara (Brajdwar)	21 km southwest	350 x 320 x 12 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW

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Jharokari	11 km southwest	230 x 210 x 6 m	RW
Maryaka	10 km west	230 x 210 x 3 m	Medieval RW
Tirwara	16 km southwest	230 x 200 x 7 m	RW
Imratpur Khera	15 km south-west	200 x 180 x 8 m	RW
Nimka	5 km west	220 x 200 x 7 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Indana	7 km west	200 x 180 x 5 m	RW
Singar	14 km west	400 x 350 x 18 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Punahana	19 km west	440 x 350 x 17 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Tek	23 km west	400 x 350 x 17 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Khaika	9 km west	250 x 230 x 8 m	RW
Saundhad (Sonhad)	4 km northwest	500 x 460 x 20 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Andhop	9 km west	280 x 230 x 10 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Ali Mev	10 km west	220 x 210 x 7 m	RW
Nangal Jat	8 km northwest	250 x 230 x 4 m	Medieval RW
Bahin	10 km northwest	280 x 260 x 12 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Banchari	4 km north	370 x 320 x 10 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Lohina	7 km northwest	230 x 210 x 5 m	RW
Seoli	9 km northwest	260 x 240 x 8 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Manpur	12 km northwest	260 x 250 x 6 m	RW
Kaundal	17 km northwest	260 x 240 x 12 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Hathin	20 km northwest	480 x 450 x 18 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Kot	17 km northwest	420 x 360 x 18 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Utawar	20 km northwest	400 x 340 x 17 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Gudhrana	15 km north	200 x 180 x 7 m	RW
Khera (Banchari)	3.5 km north	240 x 220 x 11 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Marauli	10 km north	260 x 240 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Siha	12 km north	250 x 220 x 11 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Palri	11 km north	200 x 180 x 8 m	RW

Contd...

Tikri	13 km northeast	240 x 220 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Pingor	16 km northeast	330 x 310 x 15 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Nakhraula	15 km northeast	200 x 180 x 6 m	RW
Khanbi	9 km north-east	270 x 250 x 9 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Ghasaira	12 km northeast	200 x 180 x 7 m	RW
Gulawad	24 km northeast	240 x 220 x 9 m	RW
Atarchata	23 km northeast	210 x 200 x 11 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Jatauli	21 km northeast	230 x 220 x 8 m	RW
Khirbi	5 km east	280 x 230 x 10 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Banswa	6 km east	240 x 220 x 7 m	RW
Gaurauta	4 km northeast	220 x 210 x 4 m	RW
Khera Paingaltu	6 km northeast	230 x 210 x 10 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Bijolikhera	11 km northeast	200 x 180 x 3 m	RW
Khera b/w Bhiruki and Bhandoli	12 km northeast	220 x 210 x 7 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Bhandoli	14 km northeast	220 x 210 x 6 m	RW
Ramgarh	15 km northeast	230 x 210 x 4 m	Medieval RW
Darana	16 km northeast	200 x 180 x 6 m	RW
Likhi	17 km northeast	250 x 240 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW
Sainoli (Hasanpur)	14 km northeast	340 x 300 x 14 m	PGW, BSW, GW, RW, BRW

A Case Study of Ancient Site Saundhad

Saundhad or Saund is an extensive settlement situated about 4 kilometers to the north-west of Hodal lying on the important ancient route linking Hodal with Nuh *via* Kot and Utawar. The area of the ancient site is about 500 x 460 x 20m and it is occupied by the present village populace. The site dates back in antiquity to painted-grey-ware, black-slipped-ware and black-and-red-ware using culture and continued through the succeeding phases of northern-black-polished-ware culture, Śuṅga, Kushāṇa, Gupta, medieval periods up to modern times. This is a typical site of the area exemplifying the cultural succession. There is possibility of pre-PGW occupation in the area as well as at this site but it could not be confirmed in limited exploratory work.

A popular *kinivadanti* in Braja says:

*'Ita varahada uta sonahada sūrasena uta grāma /
vraja chaurāsi kosa mem mathurāmaṇḍala dhāma //'*

Growse had talked about a similar tradition but it was possibly a corrupt form of the above *kinivadanti* (Growse 1883: 78). This *dohā* had probably got drawn from *Gargasamhitā*, one of the important compositions exclusively related with Vraja and its episodes. In it Gargāchārya talks about Vraja to Nandarāya in the following *śloka*:

*'Prāgudīvyāṁ varhishado dakṣiṇasyāṁ yadopurāt /
paśchimāyāṁ śoṇapurānmāthuramaṇḍalam viduḥ //
viśaṁdyojana vistīrṇa sāryadyojane navai /
māthuramaṇḍalam divyaṁ vrajamāhurmanīṣiṇaḥ //'*

Scholars identify this Sonhad or Śoṇapurā with the ancient village of Saundhad. Sohna near Gurgaon is also a claimant for it. I consider either of two, i.e. Saundhad or Sohna to be northern limit of Braja (Gupta 2013: 4).

Saundhad has provided evidence of ancient images as well. Such images are kept in few heaps at local village shrines. One such spot is situated just by the side of an ancient pond which is called Sūrya-kuṇḍa (Plate 1). This pond must be having brick walls in the past but now all the bricks have been robbed and only in one part modern bricks are visible. Just by visiting the area one can be sure of the fact that this pond formed an important part of religious landscape of ancient Saundhad and various shrines from the time immemorial were located near it.

Of a large number of scattered sculpture fragments, few are important. One such fragment (Plate 2) in red sandstone represents the upper half of a human figure who is identifiable as Lord Viṣṇu on the basis of attributes in the hands. The deity is shown four-handed. In his upper left hand he is holding a disc while the attribute in his upper right hand is obliterated now. In his lower hands he is holding a conch which is kept near his chest. The sculpture is quite mutilated to be dated securely but seems early. Another important finding from the village is a mutilated Śiva-līṅga (Plate 3) which is made of white spotted red sandstone and is *ekamukhi*. This Śiva-līṅga might be datable to the early centuries of the Common Era (corresponding to the Kushāṇa period in this region). Another image lying in the village is of eight-handed female deity, possibly Durgā (Plate 4). The deity sits on double-lion throne and his lower left hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu* whereas the attributes in her remaining seven hands are missing. On the lower side, two female attendants on either side flank the deity. In the middle registers a male figure rides on *aśva-vyāla* on either side of the deity. On her left, in the top register, a female deity is shown standing possible on an elephant head. By her side, a female deity sits in *lalitāsana*. The same representation might have been there on the right side of the main deity but the slab is broken from there.

One of the images (Plate 5) has its head and feet part broken but it is quite artistic. The deity represented is wearing a garland of skull-caps. He is possibly four handed but two

of the hands are missing altogether. A sword is shown hanging by his chest running up to his waist. His left leg is raised on something which is now missing; this type of posture is generally called *ālīḍha* pose. By the garland of skull cap and the attacking stance, the male deity shall be identified as Śiva either as *andhakāsuravadha-mūrti* or some other *saṁhāramūrti* and may be datable to the late Gupta period. Another fragmentary piece from Saundhad (Plate 6) is the broken part of a medieval image, possibly of Viṣṇu. On either side of broken head of the deity are two seated figures which may be identified as four-handed tricephalic Brahmā and four-handed Śiva. Another headless sculpture (Plate 7) may be identified as Viṣṇu on secure basis. The four-handed deity is wearing a long *vanamālā* and is holding in his lower left hand a discus. The features of other hands are obliterated. This image may belong to the ninth-tenth century CE. There is also lying a lower part of Mahishamardinī image in the village (Plate 8) which is again datable to the ninth-tenth century CE. A broken sculptural relief (Plate 9) is part of a temple door-frame and possibly belongs to Sūrya as lotus is visible as an attribute in the left hand of the deity. There are five minor deities represented in the upper register of this panel. These may either be five of the *aṣṭadikpālas* or *navagrahas*. There is a pillar base with full vase motif (Plate 10) lying in the village which also belongs to *circa* tenth century CE.

In a relief (Plate 11) belonging to the post-Gupta period, goddess Śrī - Lakshmī is shown seated to the right of the god of wealth and occupies slightly more space than Kubera. She has more attendants in comparison to Kubera and is being lustrated by two elephants. Similar relief (prior to it as well as in later times) turns into the concept of triad where Gaṇeśa is added to the right of Śrī - Lakshmī. A red sandstone human head (Plate 12) was also observed in the village which might be datable to the late Gupta period.

Overall, it can be said that Saundhad was an important town of the region during the ancient period. There were religious activity in the form of sculptures at least during the Kushāṇa period and that continued during the succeeding Gupta and medieval periods. There must have been a temple or many temples near the ancient pond on the outskirts of the village. All the findings observed in the village belong to Brahmanical religion and the deity represented does not belong to a single cult. It indicates that most of the ancient images are lost and only few fragments of varying nature survive as the vestiges of the past which are just indicative of religious activity at the site.

References

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Pl. 15.1 : Ancient Images Sūrya-kunḍa side, Saundhad.



Pl. 15.2 : Fragmentary Image of Viṣṇu.



Pl. 15.3 : Mutilated Śiva-līṅga.



Pl. 15.4 : Eight-handed Female Deity, possibly Durgā.



Pl. 15.5 : Fragmentary Image of Śiva.



Pl. 15.6 : Fragmentary Image of Viṣṇu.



Pl. 15.7 : Fragmentary Image of Viṣṇu.



Pl. 15.8 : Fragmentary Artefact.



Pl. 15.9 : Fragmentary Artefact bearing Image of Sūrya.



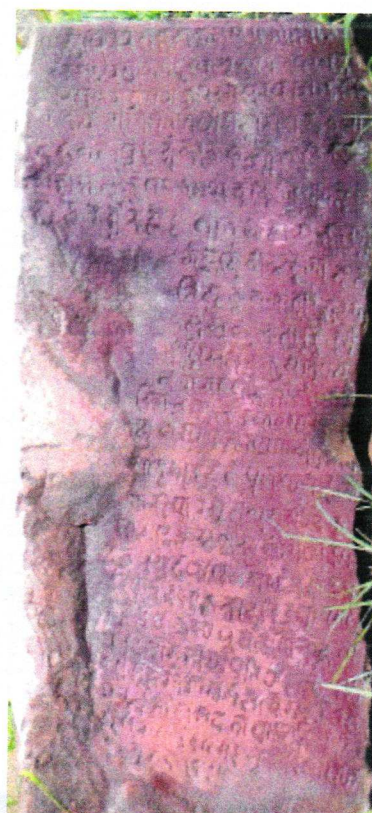
Pl. 15.10: Pillar Base with Vase Motif.



Pl. 15.11: Relief bearing the figures of Lakshmi and Kubera.



Pl. 15.12: Human Head.



**Pl. 16.1 : Maḍai Stone Inscription of
Gāṅgeyadeva, K. year 781.**