

Archaeological Landscape of Ancient Mathura in Relation to Its Art Workshops

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Abstract

Mathura is well known as a great archaeological site and art centre, but due to lack of detailed information about the various find-spots and the corresponding archaeological landscape, sometimes it is difficult to form a complete idea of the subject. The present article intends to identify all the find-spots based on my intensive field work in and around the Mathura city. A similar study can also be pursued for the entire area of the Braj region but the article is limited here to the ancient city only. The earliest settlement of Mathura is situated on the banks of river Yamuna and that has now taken the form of lofty mounds. It dates back to the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) period and has continued till the recent times. The first extension of the city occurs during the Northern Black Painted Ware (NBPW) times which, in some part, coincides with the Mauryan period. During the succeeding centuries a large number of sites come into existence outside the fortification of the ancient city and these have provided a great number of sculptures and related material. Most of the times, the scholar's viewpoint about Mathura is derived based on these findings. The article talks about the relationship of these findings with the overall archaeological scenario of the city and the relationship various peripheral sites enjoy in relation to the urban town. A lot of emphasis is given to the nature of these sites and then the article attempts to form a proper idea of the ancient landscape of ancient Mathura and also about its relationship with art workshops.

Keywords

Mathura, archaeology, monasteries, PGW, Kuṣāṇa, Buddhist

Mathura (27.4925°N; 77.6736°E) is well known as one of the most important ancient cities.

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Our knowledge about Mathura is primarily based on the works of F.S. Growse who pioneered Mathura studies during the late nineteenth century,² the Archaeological Survey Field reports of Sir Alexander Cunningham,³ V.A. Smith's writing on Jaina Stūpas and antiquities from Mathura,⁴ reports of J.Ph. Vogel in the Archaeological Survey of India's Annual reports,⁵ Vogel's *Catalogue*⁶ and V.S. Agrawala's Catalogues of Mathura Museum,⁷ H. Hartel's report on Sonkh excavations as a sample for detailed archaeological sequence of sites in the region,⁸ works of R.C. Sharma on the Buddhist art of Mathura including the clearance excavations at Govind Nagar⁹ and the compendium of various important articles on Mathura in an edited volume on Mathura by Doris Srinivasan.¹⁰ Most of the writings are not complete for the archaeology of Mathura and fall short of providing much-needed information. All the information available is in some kind of isolation which needs to be brought together and updated along with the results of more intensive field work. Archaeological find-places need to be understood as archaeological sites and not just as find-spots of some sculpture or inscription as most of the previously known data provide. I intend to try to correlate the findings of my field work with the archaeological landscape of Mathura. Now, the study of ancient Mathura can be taken up either limiting it to the ancient city only or extending it to the entire region surrounding it. In the present article, it is attempted to delve into the archaeological landscape of the ancient city only (Figure 1). Taking a customary look at the city of Mathura, one observes a densely populated town on the right bank of the river Yamuna situated on lofty mounds. The south to north length of the lofty area is about 3.5 km starting from about Mathura Cantonment Railway Station (Bahadurpura locality) in the south to Ganesh Tila–Jaisinghpura in the north, with various disturbances in its lofty nature in between. From east to west the distance covered by the lofty mounds is about 2 km from the Yamuna to Govind Nagar. Because of the human activities in the last three decades, a number of changes have taken place in the original nature of many mounds. There is possibility that one chain of lofty mounds (Chaubara mounds) would have continued towards Mandi Samiti up to Pali-Khera and Satoha villages but that is non-existent for many decades now. If we take up the area of the earliest known culture of the city, that is, the Painted Grey Ware (hereinafter PGW) then on a confirmed basis the regular chain of mounds starts from Raja Bali Ka Tila along the Yamuna¹¹ and continues up to Ambarish Tila, just having a north–south distance of about 2.25 km. In the east–west direction, this distance from the Yamuna to Katra comes out to be about 2 km. In between there are few areas which are simply located

² Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*.

³ Cunningham, *A.S.R.* (Vols. I, III, XI, XVII, XX).

⁴ Smith, *The Jaina Stūpa and Other Antiquities at Mathura*.

⁵ *ASI-AR* (1906–07, 1908–09, 1909–10, 1911–12).

⁶ Vogel, *Catalogue of the Archaeological Museum at Mathura*.

⁷ Agrawala, 'Catalogue of the Buddha and Bodhisattva Images in Mathura Museum'; Agrawala, 'Catalogue of Mathura Museum—Architectural Pieces'; Agrawala, 'Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras and Other Miscellaneous Figures'; Agrawala, *A Catalogue of the Brāhmaṇical Images in Mathura Art*.

⁸ Hartel, *Excavations at Sonkh*.

⁹ Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathura*.

¹⁰ Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*.

¹¹ Gupta, *Mathura: An Art and Archaeological Study*, pp. 16–17.

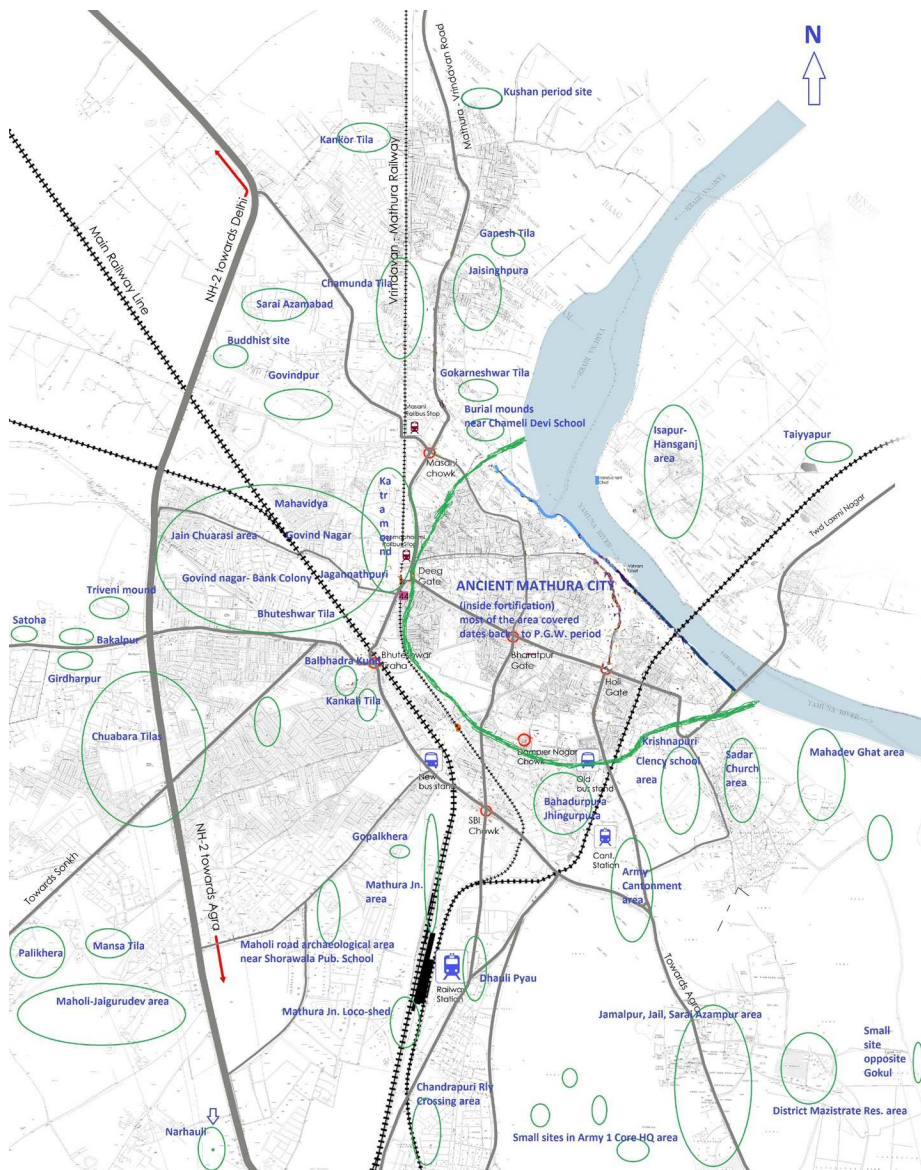


Figure 1. Map of Mathura City Showing Archaeological Sites

Source: Basic map of Mathura is courtesy The Braj Foundation while all the archaeological spots are marked by the author.

on the present ground level or are devoid of PGW levels as far as the limited surface explorations prove. Since M.C. Joshi reported Mauryan horizon from Chamunda Tila, one can extend the Mauryan area up to that site.¹² There is even the possibility of a pre-Kuṣāṇa horizon in the Jaisinghpura locality situated to the north of the Chamunda and Gokarneshwar sites. But during my field work no Mauryan evidence was visible at Chamunda and Gokarneshwar sites. If some important mounds of ancient Mathura are to be named which date back to the Mauryan or prior times, then one may include: Raja Bali Ka Tila, Nag Tila, the lofty mounds forming one continuous chain from Bengali Ghat to Chakratirtha Ghat of which Kans Qila has an exposed section, Hathi Tila, Manoharpura, Dalpat Khirki, Maholi ki Paur, Chaubiapara, Chaubachcha, Nagla Paysa, Gujar Ghati, Kushak, Ghati Bahal Rai, Shitla Ghati, Shitla Paysa, Mandi Ramdas, Gatashram Tila, Varaha Tila, Hanuman Tila, Ambarish Tila, Kachchi Sadak, Mandi Ramdas, Rani ki Mandi, the lofty Muslim-dominated area near Dirgha Vishnu Temple, mounds in the back and front of Brij Chikitsa Sansthan (Daresi), Katra, Jagannathpuri, Bhuteshwar, the mound in front of K.R. Girls Inter College, etc. The area to the south of Kotwali Road and Bharatpur Gate has a significant slope which also contains certain archaeological material but whether it is pre-Kuṣāṇa or not, cannot be confirmed. It is a similar case with spots like Antapara, Museum, the area adjoining Ambakhar Nala, Rangeshwar, Jhingurpura and Bahadurpura. Various sculptural findings of Kuṣāṇa and later periods have been reported from these areas but because of these being densely in habitation, it is very difficult to say whether they have a thick earlier deposit or not. But all these areas were part of the main city during the Kuṣāṇa and later periods. This area was housing the majority of city population of the times which in modern parlance can be called the urban area of those times. This whole area would also fall inside the city fortification which was firstly suggested by F.S. Growse¹³ and was confirmed later on by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) excavations, partly by Ballabh Saran and Venkatrammaiy¹⁴ and largely by M.C. Joshi and his ASI team.¹⁵ Since the details of Joshi's work are not available, it is difficult to confirm the nature of some of the peripheral sites like Jaisinghpura and Bahadurpura, though he considers Gokarneshwar Tila as part of fortification and the site of Kankali Tila outside the fortification for sure.¹⁶

As per my observation, various mounds without much of habitation deposit are also located in the city. Some of these can be identified. Starting from the northern side, the Jaisinghpura area, the mound attached with Chamunda Tila is a part of it. Then, near Saraswati Kund, just across the Masani Railway crossing, there is a similar extensive mound. The mound at Ramlila Ground and Jawahar Inter College are up to an extent part of it, extension of which is visible near the Delhi–Mathura Railway track where it is attached with a habitation mound. Then such natural type soil elevation is visible towards the backside of Water Works at Bhuteshwar. Then it would have crossed towards K.R. Degree College somewhere near Hathi Tila but there is much destruction

¹² Joshi, 'Mathura as an Ancient Settlement', p. 168.

¹³ Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Indian Archaeology 1954–55—A Review*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Joshi, 'Mathura as an Ancient Settlement', pp. 165–70.

¹⁶ Joshi, 'Mathura as an Ancient Settlement', Fig. 18.1.

near the railway track and Amarnath School so that it is not identifiable. Then such mounds are visible near Gayatri Tila, Vikas Bazar, Kans Ka Tila, one near Ambakhar Nala across Krishnapuri and then possibly towards the Church area and then finally near the Yamuna. On some of these mounds deposits belonging to the Kuṣāṇa and later periods is also observed but that does not go very deep.

Now we need to take a look at the sites in close vicinity to the ancient city which were peripheral or sub-urban in nature and housed a population which was somewhat different from the population living in the main city. Nature of most of such sites was either religious or was as the centres of sculpture carving. This does not mean that inside the main city there were no religious centres or centres of carving, but our information in this regard is just limited. Such peripheral sites would include the Gopal Khera–Mathura Junction site (near Maholi Road), the Railway Colony site, Dhauli Pyau, the Chandrapuri Crossing site, the Mathura Junction site near 3RPD, three sites in the Army 1 Corps Headquarters area near the Helipad, the Sadar area along the Yamuna, the area in Civil Lines near the District Magistrate's Bungalow, one site along the Yamuna opposite Gokul, the Jamalpur mound area, the Jail and Jawahar Bagh area, Sarai Azamabad, the Army Firing Range site, Birjapur, Tantura and Nawada villages, the Kankali Tila–Balbhadra Kund area, Govind Nagar, the Jain Chaurasi area, the Vishwalakshmi Nagar–Triveni mound area, the extinct mounds of Bakalpur, Girdharpur and Chaubara, a few extinct mounds on the Sonkh Road and Maholi Road, Bhojpur Nagla, Mansa Tila area, one site on the outskirts of Narhauri village, Kankor Tila, the extinct site of Ahalyaganj, Kota, Chharaira, Bajna village sites, Azamabad and the Govindganj site, the Isapur–Hansganj and Taiyyapur sites across the Yamuna, etc. A few sites on the periphery of ancient village settlements Ganeshra, Satoha, Pali-khera and Maholi may also be included among such sites.

A description of the above-mentioned sites is follows.

Raja Bali Ka Tila

This site is situated in close proximity to the river Yamuna and Saptarshi Tila. The mound is about 12 m in height and is occupied by modern houses on its top. The antiquity of the mound goes back to the PGW period and continues up to modern times without any significant break. The mound has a huge ashy deposit which is traditionally considered to be the ash of *yajña* done by Mahārāja Bali. From here starts the regular chain of habitation mounds dating back to at least PGW period.

Saptarshi, Dhruv, Narad and Nag Tila

These mounds are situated along the river Yamuna. These have either been cut off or houses have been constructed on top of them. Saptarshi Tila, now identifiable with the main cremation centre of the city, is related with the seven sages of Brāhmaṇical mythology. The other three mounds are related with Dhruva, the famous devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, sage Nārada and the cosmic serpent Śeṣa. These mounds form a kind of a chain along the river Yamuna while moving towards Vishram Ghat. Nag Tila in front of Subhash Inter College is still a lofty mound slightly free of modern occupation but is disturbed.

Kans Ka Qila

This isolated high mound of about 16 m height situated on the bank of the Yamuna is very disturbed and full of brickbats. Two very fine quality Black Slipped Ware (BSW) pottery pieces were found from the lower section of this mound. This mound, on its top, housed one of the six observatories of Raja Jai Singh, the famous ruler of Amber.

Ambarish Tila

This mound of about 10 m height was excavated by the ASI during 1973–77 under the leadership of late M.C. Joshi. A large part of it is occupied by modern houses. This seems to have been situated on the periphery of ancient Mathura during the late PGW and Northern Black Painted Ware (NBPW) periods. From this site a proper PGW horizon in period I A was found which according to the excavator has provided a tentative date of circa sixth century BC.¹⁷

Katra mound

This area was called so because of the presence of a somewhat fortified settlement at this site. This area near the Keshavdev Temple has been marked by Growse in his map of Mathura as a fortified enclosure¹⁸ and more details of it were obtained after the ASI excavations of 1954–55.¹⁹ The area of Katra–Keshavdev might have been the place of religious importance since early times. There is reference of a Bhāgavata temple at some place in Mathura in a first century BC inscription of the time of Śoḍāsa²⁰ which might be a reference to the Keshavdev Temple.

Here I would like to mention the important archaeological findings from the Katra area. In the excavation of 1954–55 in a deposit of 42 feet, Ballabh Saran and Venkatarammaiyya of the ASI found grey ware sherds belonging to the PGW tradition and sherds of NBPW and later periods. But the most significant finding was of a deposit containing handmade pottery which lay below the deposit containing grey ware. It is very interesting because after the Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) period, the majority of pottery found is always wheel-made. This pottery culture surely requires further research.

Bhuteshwar

In this area, situated between Balbhadra Kunda and the City Water Works, the earliest deposit belongs to the late-PGW and pre-Mauryan period (circa fifth century BC). There seems to be no significant gap between the Katra and Bhuteshwar mounds. The temple of Bhuteshwar seems to be of ancient origin as one of the four cardinal Śiva shrines. In the nearby area of Katra and Bhuteshwar, mainly in Geeta Enclave, Bank

¹⁷ Joshi, (with A.K. Sinha), 'Chronology of Mathura', pp. 39–40.

¹⁸ Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*.

¹⁹ *Indian Archaeology 1954–55—A Review*, p. 15.

²⁰ Luders, 'Seven Brahmi Inscriptions from Mathura', pp. 208–10.

colony, etc., there were situated many monastic establishments during the Kuṣāṇa and succeeding period.

Hathi Tila

This mound, which is situated in the rear side of K.R. Degree College and extends towards Manoharpura area, belongs to the Mauryan and later periods as the finding of Mauryan grey ware and pottery of succeeding periods indicate. It is still largely unoccupied. This site lies within the ancient fortification and is very close to it.

Chamunda Tila

This mound seems to be a later extension of the city during the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods. It is named so because of the presence of the famous Chamunda Mata temple at the site. This mound with a maximum height of about 6 m was earlier under government protection and is almost non-existent now.

Kankali Tila

Kankali Tila, excavated on a large scale, has provided archaeological evidence dating back to the early second century BC and continuing up to the medieval period.²¹ The site is named so because of the presence of a Kankali Mata temple at the site. At the site, a Kuṣāṇa period tank was excavated. Besides this tank, another tank Balbhadra Kunda which is much larger and quite ancient lies behind Kankali Tila.

Jamalpur and Other Mounds Near By

Jamalpur or the Jail mound, the site of ancient monasteries of the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods and the find-spot of the two exquisitely beautiful Gupta-period Buddha images is now levelled to ground and nothing can be found at the site except for some degenerated potsherds and brickbats. It is situated near the ancient highway, that is why its location at about 3 km away from the main city is justified. Such types of monastic sites were more in number within a semi-circle towards the south from the city of Mathura. An interesting fact is that a Kuṣāṇa period Sapta-mātṛka panel (M.M. No. F 39) was found from the same area along with evidence of the presence of a shrine of Nāga Dadhikarṇa and also of Śrī-Lakṣmī.

Sadar Area along the Yamuna up to Magistrate's Bungalow

A number of monastic and other religious establishments were situated along the Yamuna and the nearby area of Sadar. Many images of varying religious affiliations have been reported from this area. This area has gone through many changes because of the Yamuna floods and human activities.

²¹ Joshi, 'Mathura as an Ancient Settlement', pp. 168–69.

Gokarneshwar Mound

The Gokarneshwar mound has been shown by M.C. Joshi as the northernmost fortification part of the ancient city.²² The height of the mound, which is occupied by deposits of the Kuṣāṇa period, is not more than 3 m. Though Joshi has considered it as a part of fortification, it does not seem to be the case. This area of the mound (about $180 \times 150 \times 3$ m in dimension) has provided sculptures belonging to all three ancient faiths—Brāhmaṇa, Buddhist and Jaina. Besides, one image of the Sun God (the Gokarneshwar colossus) and a royal statue were also found from this site. The locality of Jaisinghpura might be considered to be the outermost area of Mathura during ancient times and a fortification wall might have run somewhere near it.

Kankor Tila

Behind Birla *mandir* in the village Bengali Basti is an ASI-protected mound hiding some monastic or *stūpa* establishment; the height of this mound is about 1.5 m with four or five small peaks, but not forming any regular pattern. The area of this site is about 200×160 m. The pottery at this site is not found in much quantity and the brick-bats are also difficult to be found, all of these are much degenerated and deteriorated. The site dates from the Kuṣāṇa to post-Gupta periods.

Mathura Junction Mound or Gopal Khera

Near Mathura Junction Railway Station and Maholi Road, there is a small protected mound of about 2 m height. It seems that it was cut by the people in the past. The deposit of this mound dates back to the Kuṣāṇa, Gupta and succeeding periods until late medieval times.

Hansganj-Isapur

This village site famous for Durvasa Temple is located just on the opposite bank of the Yamuna, in front of Kans Qila and Ambarish Tila. The location of this site proves that the course of the Yamuna has remained the same during the last 2200 years at least. Isapur has provided a number of sculptures belonging to the first century BC, Kuṣāṇa and later periods. There is a strong possibility of it being a much earlier settlement dating back to as early as Mathura city itself. Because of the frequent river floods, the thin early deposit might have got washed away.

During my explorations, I found a deposit of about 3 m along the Yamuna course and about 6 m at some spots in the village, particularly at Durvasa Temple. This deposit is full of red ware and some ill-fired brownish ware. The area of the whole deposit is about 250×350 m. There is a little separation now between the villages of Isapur and Hansganj. The whole deposit is very disturbed by the river and human activities. During earlier times, it might have served as a crossing point of the Yamuna to go towards Gosna.

²² Joshi, 'Mathura as an Ancient Settlement', Fig. 18.1.

Taiyyapur

This site lies past Isapur after crossing the railway track to Hathras. The area of the site, almost destroyed, was about $150 \times 140 \times 2$ m. A major part of this site would have formed part of some Buddhist convent as the finding of a Kuṣāṇa period Hārītī image from here indicates²³ and the remaining part would have been habitation area. The site appears to have been in use during the early centuries of the Christian era on the basis of red ware pottery found from here.

Birjapur

This site is situated on National Highway 2 (NH 2), just touching the periphery of Mathura. From this site, one inscription of the reign of Śoḍāsa has been found, mentioning the gift of a tank by Kauśikī Pākṣaka, wife of Gaṇjāvāra (treasurer), related with the shrine of Lakṣmī, with some other associated deeds.²⁴ A similar inscription has also been reported from the Jail mound. R.C. Sharma, on the basis of his observations, tried to prove the site of Birjapur as the main site for the erection of inscriptions, rather than the Jail mound. Though he is correct in correlating the archaeological evidence from Birjapur with the inscription, it is not clear why he thought that a similar kind of donation could not have been made at two different places, located about 3 km distance from each other? Near the Jail, I found some natural depressions, which may be because of some water tank. So, according to me, both the inscriptions were found from their original location. The Birjapur evidence proves the existence of religious shrines away from the main city. The tank for which the donation was made has been identified by me at the village and is situated on the periphery of the village, just touching the Mathura–Achhnera railway track. In fact, this small site of about 80×60 m, along with an ancient pond, lies on a very important ancient alignment. From Mathura to go towards Agra via Achhnera, the route passes via the Chandrapuri Railway Crossing site, the Birjapur site, Aruki and so on. The old metre-gauge track actually follows an ancient path.

Narhauli

This site is situated on the Mathura–Bharatpur ancient route, about 400 m distant from NH 2. In fact, during the ancient times the present National Highway passed through the main city and did not follow this present route. The area of the site is about $200 \times 180 \times 6$ m. The antiquity of the site goes back to the pre-Mauryan period and it continued in habitation during the succeeding phases—the Śuṅga, Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods up to recent times. Some important Kuṣāṇa sculptures including a bacchanalian scene were found from this village. The major portion of the mound is occupied by the modern village and some part of it was cut for the construction of the Delhi–Mumbai railway track.

²³ Vogel, 'The Mathura School of Sculpture', p. 77.

²⁴ Sharma, 'New Inscriptions from Mathura', pp. 308–15.

A Site Explored Near Narhauri

The site is situated close to Narhauri village and the Delhi–Mumbai railway track is almost touching it. The site has an area of about 80×60 m with no visible height. The site is covered with the chips and debitage of red sandstone. It makes it quite probable that the site was used as a factory site for making sculptures, most probably Buddhist in nature. Kuṣāṇa bricks as well as some brick alignments of that period were also observed at the site.

Sarai Azamabad

This village is situated near the old route of NH 2. Its importance during the medieval times is known because of the presence of a fortified *sarai* at the site. Actually this site is very close to the important Kuṣāṇa monastic site of Govindpur and appears to have been an important monastic settlement before it was occupied by Muslims during the medieval period.

Kota

This site is situated just by the side of NH 2 near Rajiv Academy. The site, dating back to the Kuṣāṇa period, was an important monastic settlement of Buddhist affiliation.

A Settlement behind the Army Firing Range, Mathura

This is a site located at a distance of about 5 km south of Mathura city outside the Army Firing Range towards the side where new civilian houses have been recently constructed. The area of the site is about 70×60 m with a height of not more than 1 m. Kuṣāṇa period brickbats and pottery were found scattered over the surface of this site. It seems to have been abandoned about the fourth century AD.

A Settlement in the Army Helipad Area behind the Jawahar Bagh Fence

This site is quite similar in nature to that of above mentioned site, the area is also same. Kuṣāṇa period brickbats and some pottery were observed at the site. Most of it has been destroyed by army personnel doing their drill exercises and the tasks allotted to them by their officers.

A Settlement at the site of Army Cops Headquarters

This site was observed by me some fourteen years ago. On the spot, the Indian Army has built some bunker-type structures. The deposit and the area of the site was about 50×50 m with a height of about 1.5 m. As the headquarters building exists in this place, I feel that it might be non-existent now.

A Settlement Outside the Army Headquarters Wall, Near the Old Footpath Joining Motikunj with the Police Line Colony (Defence Hall)

This is also a small site of about 50×40 m dimension with a height of about 4 feet. Kuṣāṇa pottery, especially an inkpot-shaped lid and a number of brickbats were observed at the site. It was last seen some twelve years ago and its present status is not known to me as most of these areas have now been restricted for civilians.

A Settlement behind Police Line Residential Quarters

This site is situated between the Jawahar Bagh area and the Police Line Colony. A local drain passes near it and the District Magistrates office is not far from it. It is similar to the remaining archaeological deposit behind Mathura Jail, Government Nursery. This is in fact a continuation of monasteries unearthed by British officers at the Jamalpur, Jail and Court complex. Kuṣāṇa-period pottery and very few brickbats could be observed at the site which was almost at the same level as the nearby ground.

A Settlement on the Banks of the Yamuna, Opposite Gokul

While moving in the civil lines area, passing through Magistrate's residence on the way to Gokul, on the right bank of the Yamuna this site is situated near a temple. The site is very small, about 30×40 m, just 2 or 3 feet above ground. Kuṣāṇa potsherds and some brickbats were found scattered over its surface. Probably, during the Kuṣāṇa period, this was the place to cross the Yamuna to go towards the Gokul and Mahavan areas.

A Settlement at the Methodist Church, Sadar

A Methodist church is situated on the surface of a Yamuna *khadar* mound where scattered Kuṣāṇa-period pottery can be observed. The deposit is not thick and the size of the site is slightly larger than other such sites. It might have been an important monastic settlement during the Kuṣāṇa period. The famous Sapatarshi mound is just 500 m distant from here. But, so many changes have taken place in the area that any direct link between the two sites is not possible.

A Settlement at the Site of Christian School, Near Krishnapuri

This site is situated just in front of the church site and is almost similar in nature. The pottery of Kuṣāṇa and subsequent periods continuing up to the post-Gupta period can be observed behind this convent school. The colony of Krishnapuri along with this site would have been one of the larger monastic settlements on the outskirts of the ancient city of Mathura. While the colony of Krishnapuri is occupied by modern settlements; at this site, there is still some possibility of archaeological investigations. Most of the area of this site also comes under the Army Cantonment.

A Site at Railway Colony, Mathura

This site is situated near the old metre gauge railway crossing, 80 m from Bharatpur Road inside the Railway Colony, near a depression. Although the pottery found at the site left ochre colour on rubbing, it is Kuṣāṇa-period pottery. The size of the site is about 40×30 m and a larger part of the site seems to have been destroyed by the people. A complete Kuṣāṇa brick of about $36 \times 12 \times 5$ cm dimension was also observed at the site. The height of the site is about 1 m from the ground.

A Settlement at Chandrapuri Railway Crossing

This site has now become almost non-existent. The exact location of the site is just on the left side of the Bharatpur Road, just below the road at the railway crossing. Potsherds can still be observed here, just like those belonging to other monastic establishments of the Kuṣāṇa and pre-Kuṣāṇa period. There is possibility that few Mathura Museum sculptures with accession nos. L. 21, L. 22, L. 23, L. 24, L. 25, M. 7 could have been found from this site or a site situated near it. The foundation of Kasganj–Achnera track which passes through this site from the railway crossing up to a distance of 400 m is made up of archaeological deposit dating back to late PGW times and continuing in subsequent periods, possibly till late medieval times.

A Settlement at the Vishwa Lakshmi Nagar–Triveni Site, Mathura

This site is situated near the Govardhan Crossing on NH 2. The site is about 150 m distant from Govardhan Road, behind Triveni Engineering Works. A miniature but much broken Kuṣāṇa-period Buddha image was recovered from here. An inscription carved on the lower half of a Buddha image (M.M. No. 78.34) was probably found somewhere near.

A Site near the Bajna Flyover on NH 2

This site is situated on the ancient route linking the famous monasteries of Bajna with that of Govindpur and those of Mathura via the Katra and Govindnagar monasteries. This site exists by the side of an industrial establishment and in all probability is private property. The presently existing portion of the site measures about 40×30 m with an approximate height of 1.5 m.

A Site at Brajwasi Udyog, Mathura

This site is situated in front of Highway Plaza Mall on NH 2. Most of the site has been destroyed by the industrial set-up, but Kuṣāṇa and even earlier pottery could be observed at this site.

A Site just Touching Sonkh Road

A small settlement of Kuṣāṇa period of about 50×40 m dimension was observed at a spot just touching the road to Sonkh, in between Mandi Samiti and Pali Khera villages. The height of the site is not more than 1.2 m.

A Site at Brajwasi Poultry Farm, Sonkh Road

This site is situated about 100 m inside from the road to Sonkh, in front of Pali Khera village. The ancient settlement behind the farm has been cut to form an agricultural field. Brick walls of about 30 m length are visible in the section. The bricks are much degenerated but still prove that these belong to the Kuṣāṇa period. The number of potsherds is very small as this was a structural site of some significance. The farm is situated on the ground level but the walls are visible till a depth of 1.5 m from the ground level.

A Settlement on Sonkh Road

A monastic settlement belonging to the Kuṣāṇa period was observed at a place about 100 m away from Sonkh road near the villages of Salempur and Mukundpur. This site is approached after the village Pali Khera. The scarcity of potsherds here again indicates it to be a monastic settlement which would not have continued after the Kuṣāṇa period.

Bhojpur Nagla

Bhojpur Nagla is a site situated to the west of Sonkh Road about 5 km distant from the Kankali mound, Mathura. The site is situated on the northwestern part of the village. The site having an area of 100×80 m with a height of about 3 m is a significant site. The site belongs to the pre-Kuṣāṇa (first century BC) Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods.

Ganesh Tila

Ganesh Tila is an isolated mound of Jaisinghpura on the outskirts of Mathura very near the course of the Yamuna. Presently, a Hindu temple exists on the top of the mound. The mound is about 20 m in radius and about 8 m high. On the surface of mound, regular archaeological deposits are absent. Only a few potsherds of late periods were observed. Such isolated mounds are exceptional in the region. In all probability it was a *stūpa* which was not very far from the site of Gokarneshwar. A few Buddhist sculptures (the headless Buddha statuette from Ganesh Tila well, M.M. No. 867, etc.) as well as Brāhmaṇical sculptures have been reported from Jaisinghpura area. This whole area contains archaeological deposits and it is above that deposit that Ganesh Tila Temple is situated.

Satoha

Satoha is an important ancient site with regular archaeological deposits from the PGW period to the contemporary period. But outside the village, there is a Surya Kuṇḍa and on its corner there is an isolated lofty mound. There is a famous Hindu temple on the top of this mound. The diameter of the mound is about 15 m and height about 14 m which is higher than the height of regular archaeological deposits at the village proper. Very few potsherds could be observed on the mound. Two broken Hārītī images were observed at a Hindu shrine there. Some other Buddhist sculptures like a lower door jamb (M.M. No. P 14) were also found from this site, along with some Brāhmaṇical sculptures of a slightly later date. Like the road to Sonkh, this road to Govardhan, on

which this site is situated, was very important for Buddhist establishments. The sites of Triveni, Bakalpur, Girdharpur lie between Mathura and Satoha. These sites are very close to each other.

Mahavidya Mandir Tila

The site of the Mahavidya Devi Temple is quite similar to the Ganesh Tila site. The roughly hemispherical mound has a radius of about 15 m and a height of about 10 m. Just at the base of this mound a beautiful pillar (M.M. No. N 9) carved with the figure of Māyādevī standing under a *śāla* tree, and a square stone box with a seated Buddha on each of its four sides, were found. It probably was a *stūpa* mound. Just at the base of this *stūpa*, there lies an ancient tank having dimensions of about 50 × 50 × 12 m which was a well-built structure dating back to the Kuṣāṇa period. In the lower portion of the tank, Kuṣāṇa bricks are easily identifiable. The tank was renovated from time to time as the use of bricks of the Gupta, post-Gupta and medieval periods indicate. Now, the tank has been completely renovated with the modern bricks and cement mortar by the local people.

Gayatri Tila

From this site, a number of Buddhist sculptural findings have been reported and are now a part of the collection of Mathura Museum. It is quite difficult to confirm the location of the mound since one mound known as Gayatri Tila lies just in front of K.R. Degree College, whereas one mound near the Yamuna behind Gayatri Tapobhumi is also known. Both the mounds are of similar appearance and a part of both the mounds is being used as a burial ground.

Chaubara Mounds

These mounds would have formed a chain of one of the most important Buddhist establishments near the city of Mathura. The exact location of them is still not clear, though these mounds seem to be spread in a vast area, from the Sonkh Road near the Mandi bye pass to the area of Brajwasi Udyog, Girraj Maharaj College, Vasant Vihara up to Shriji Baba School. Nothing of that sort has been observed in this area in spite of repeated visits. These mounds seem to be the most destroyed of mounds during and after British rule. When the road to Sonkh was laid in 1868, one of these mounds exposed a masonry cell which contained a small golden casket.²⁵ Cunningham, from another Chaubara mound, found a steatite casket in 1872 and it was made over to the Indian Museum, Calcutta.²⁶ Another important find which Cunningham has mentioned is a pillar capital adorned with four seated animals; it was recovered from Chaubara mound B. A colossal Buddha head bearing 'Egyptian features' was a remarkable discovery made by Growse from this site (M.M. No. A. 27). A pedestal of the Buddha image in early Brāhmī characters records the year 33 in the reign of Mahārāja Devaputra

²⁵ Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*, p. 122.

²⁶ Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*, p. 123.

Huviṣka. Cross-bars of Buddhist railings recovered from here represented different figures and motifs.

Bhuteshwar-Kankali Area

This area has provided one of the largest collections of ancient sculptures from Mathura, which are Jaina in the majority, but also prominently belong to Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical religions.²⁷ The site at Kankali housed three Jaina *stūpas* and other temples. The existence of a Buddhist *stūpa* is indicated by the fact that a fight had occurred between the two communities for the ownership of the site. The finding of Buddhist sculptures and railing fragments also attests to this fact. Besides, this site also housed a *mihiragrha* (temple of the Sun god). Other images of Brāhmaṇical gods like Kārttikeya, Mātrkā panel, etc., have also been found from here. The nearby sites of Bhuteshwar and Balabhadra Kuṇḍa have provided a number of Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta sculptures, the majority of which belong to the Buddhist religion and the remaining to the Brāhmaṇical religion. In the year 1975, officials of the ASI had excavated a fine brick tank at the site of Kankali, which has now turned into a dirty pond for drainage purposes.

Govindnagar Mound(s)

The site of Govindnagar is, in fact, a continuation of the mounds of Katra, Mahavidya from eastern side, and site of Chaurasi from the northern side and almost touches the site of the Bhuteshwar Water Works with an irregular pond in between. The Delhi-Mumbai railway track has played a huge role in separating the long series of these mounds. The whole colony of Jagannathpuri which lies between Bhuteshwar and Katra is equally rich in archaeological deposits, but is occupied by modern houses. Pre-Mauryan, Mauryan and Śuṅga deposits underlie the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta deposits at the site of Govindnagar. The site is actually very large and only a very small part (less than one-sixth of the whole area) could be cleared by R.C. Sharma,²⁸ and that is the area which is still somehow under government protection. An inscription from Govindnagar mentions the name of a monastery as Vīradatta vihāra (M.M. No. 76.34).

Chaurasi Mound(s)

This site is situated near the Jambuswami Digambara Jaina area and has provided both Jaina and Buddhist antiquities. From the survey in the area and Cunningham's description that the people reported to him that no stones were found in these mounds, it appears that these served as large earthen *stūpas* and only few monasteries were situated near these which were almost at the same height as the ground level. From Chaurasi and surrounding areas large-size fragments of Buddhist railings and door jambs were acquired and deposited in the Mathura Museum in 1957 (57.4446–48). Cross-bar fragments of a *stūpa* (No. L 31) was also deposited in Mathura Museum from here.

²⁷ Gupta, *Buddhism in Mathura*, pp. 43–44.

²⁸ Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathura*.

Girdharpur Mound

This site is situated on the left side of the road to Govardhan. This important site was excavated in the year 1913. At that time a number of Buddhist sculptures and railing stones were unearthed. A Nāgī pedestal (M.M. No. 17.1316) from the site mentions the name of the monastery as Prāvārika vihāra. It was an important Buddhist centre during the second and third centuries AD and the site was spread in an area of about 150 × 100 m. Besides, a few Brāhmaṇical images including a Balarāma and two Harihara images were also found from there. Now the whole site, which was under so-called government protection, has been completely razed to ground and nothing of significance exists there. The Buddhist antiquities from this site now housed in Mathura Museum are: a Bodhisattva image (No. 1310), a Buddha head (No. 1335) and Buddhist architectural fragments (Nos. 1307, 1329, 1330).

Ahalyaganj Mound

This was a mound of similar nature as the Kankor mound, but this site has been completely destroyed and nothing significant of that now remains. This site was situated mid-way between Mathura and Vrindavan near the Gas Godam curve. A few Brāhmaṇical images were also reported from this site.

Mathura Junction Area

A number of Buddhist sculptures have been found from the area of the Mathura Junction Loco Shed. A Buddha pedestal from this site (M.M. No. 10.121) mentions a '*chaitya kuṭiya svakaya*' at which the image was donated by Nāgapriya for Dharmaguptikas. A railing fragment from this site has been kept at the Mathura Museum (No. 115). The exact nature of this site cannot be determined as it is non-existent. But near the Army's 3RPD area wall near a *kachchi pagadandi* going towards the Industrial Area, some potsherds like those that are usually found at Buddhist sites of the Kuṣāṇa and later periods were observed.

Ganeshra

This village is situated about 4 km from Mathura. A number of Buddhist sculptures were reported from the site in the past. The village was probably a habitation site, which had Buddhist *vihāras* and *stūpas* on its outskirts. One of the inscriptions from the site mentions a *stūpa*. The Buddhist sculptures from the site housed in Mathura Museum are: a Bodhisattva image (No. A 45) and railing pieces (Nos. F 10, F 48, F 59 and 464).

Maholi

This is the place of ancient Madhuvana and the name Maholi is derived from Madhupurī. This is a very important ancient site dating back to the PGW period. A number of important Kuṣāṇa and Gupta sculptures have been found from this site. This site is

actually a cluster of mounds. A large part of that is occupied by the present-day village population. A number of ancient sites are scattered between Jai Gurudev temple and village Maholi, in an area of more than 2 km. All these sites behind the temple have been completely destroyed. The important Buddhist findings from Maholi now housed in Mathura Museum are: a Buddha image (No. 1316), a seated Buddha figure (No. 514), a colossal Bodhisattva (No. 2798), a parasol (No. 2799), inscription No. 2801 mentioning Khaṇḍa *vihāra*, railing pillars (Nos. 517, 1501, 1508) and fragments of door-jambs (Nos. P 10 and P 11). Besides, a number of Brāhmaṇical images are also reported from this village including a Śivaliṅga.

Salempur Village

A good number of sculptures, Brāhmaṇical as well as Buddhist were found from Salempur wells, just like the Pali Khera wells. The site of Salempur is situated in between Maholi and Pali Khera village. On closer examination of this village it was found that this village was not a regular habitation site like the main village of Maholi. On the outskirts of Salempur village (towards the Maholi side), there is an ancient pond and a Hindu temple. Outside the temple on the *kachcha* road, structural remains of a Buddhist monastery of the Kuṣāṇa period were noticed. The area of this site would be about 60 × 80 m. The remains can be observed on ground level or below it. The pond is definitely related with this site and in its chance diggings a number of Kuṣāṇa brick alignments were exposed. A stone stair set of that period was also exposed. One of the wells on the eastern corner of this pond seems to be the famous Salempur well and it also dates back to the Kuṣāṇa period. The Buddhist images from here now housed in the Mathura Museum are: a Bodhisattva Maitreya (No. 746) and railing pillar (No. 200).

Pali Khera

This is one of the famous sites of Mathura. The village is situated near the Sonkh road. The actual mound of the site was located outside the village and is one of the most disastrously dug out sites. The site can be identified near an old village temple outside the road linking Pali Khera with the road to Sonkh. The monastic establishment was situated over the ancient mound of PGW and the Mauryan period, as the pottery from the excavated fields at 2 m depth indicates. Four bell capitals of Buddhist pillars along with a famous bacchanalian image and some other Buddhist images were found at the site by Growse. This whole area between Kankali, Chaubara, Maholi, Salempur, Pali Khera, Bhojpur Nagla and Naugaon was occupied by various monastic settlements, but it was and is difficult to locate them because the level of Kuṣāṇa period settlements was the same as the ground level. The important images from here now housed in the Mathura Museum are: a Broken Buddha and Bodhisattva images (Nos. 664; 665; 667; 885; 907; 921; 992; 1211; 1217; 870; 877; 939; 1004) and fragments of railing pillars (Nos. J 66; 663) and a fragment carved with a sejant lion (No. 718), a pillar base (No. P. 12) and a lamp-stand (No. P. 13). Besides, Pali Khera has also provided one of the largest repositories of Kuṣāṇa Brāhmaṇical images.

Mansa Tila

This mound is situated between Jai Gurudev Temple and Pali Khera village. The site is an isolated mound of dimensions about $80 \times 80 \times 9$ m. Potsherds belonging to the Kuṣāṇa and later periods can be observed on the mound. A modern temple with the residence of a so-called *sadhu* is located on the top of the mound. The mound is situated in the zone of important Buddhist sites. Besides the possibility of it itself being a *stūpa* mound, chances of monastic settlements at and near the mound are also there. Kuṣāṇa-period pottery and structural remains were observed from fields lying between Mansa Tila and Pali Khera.

Analysis

When we plot all these archaeological sites on a map, we observe that most of the peripheral sites are not regular habitation mounds. These generally served as religious centres or centres of sculpture carving. Since most part of the ancient city is situated along the Yamuna, it would have served as the all-important water body, not just for daily needs but also for religious purposes. A number of Kuṣāṇa-period and later sculptures have been found from the banks of the Yamuna not just along the ancient city but also from the area south of it, especially the Sadar, Mahadev Ghat, Rawal and Gokul and Brahmand Ghat areas. The same pattern of ancient sites is observed to the north of ancient city, that is, moving towards Vrindavan from Gokarneshwar, Jaisinghpura, the PMV Polytechnic Site, Ahalyaganj, Akrur to sites in Vrindavan town. Many of the Kuṣāṇa period monastic establishments, generally of Buddhist affiliation were situated in close proximity to the river. Even for other establishments which were away from the river, we observe the presence of some water body in the close vicinity. The famous site of Kankali had one brick-built tank of the Kuṣāṇa period as well as the large tank of Balabhadra Kuṇḍa in the vicinity. There is a huge depression near the site of Govind Nagar as well as of Bhuteshwar. Near the Katra mound is the extensive tank known as Potra Kund. By the side of Mahavidya Devi Temple is another big tank datable to the Kuṣāṇa period on a secure basis. By the side of a small site in the Railway Colony is a significant depression which is still serving as a *pokhar*. By the side of the Vishwalakshmi Nagar–Triveni site, a depression is visible towards the road to Govardhan. There is a huge depression still visible on both sides of the Dhauri Pyau locality from where a few Buddhist images of the Kuṣāṇa period are known. One of the depressions is also connected with the Chandrapuri Crossing site. Depressions are also visible on both the ends of the Mathura Junction railway station towards the new bus stand as well as the loco shed. One of the depressions is also associated with the Buddhist site known as the Mathura Junction (Gopal-khera) protected site. For the Jail mound, there is the inscrip-tional evidence for the presence of a tank and the shrine of Nāga Dadhikarṇa. For the sites in the Army 1 Corps Headquarters area, there is the possibility of the presence of depressions as ancient water bodies. For the site of Birjapur, we again have an inscrip-tional evidence for the presence of a tank and a shrine of Lakṣmī. Near the site of Narhau village as well as the monastic site, there are natural depressions. The land scenario of the area lying between Maholi, Salempur, Pali-Khera and Satoha has changed so much that it is not possible to formulate an idea about this whole area; but as far as Maholi, Salempur and Satoha as village sites are concerned, we have evidence

of ancient ponds still surviving. The pond at Salempur consists of a few ancient wells as well and we are aware of four ancient wells from Pali-Khera which have provided a large number of Kuṣāṇa-period sculptures mostly Brāhmaṇical in nature. Satoha's famous pond is known as Santanu Kund, deriving its name from King Śāntanu, father of Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata*. Near the sites of Ganeshra, Bajna and Kota, the presence of ancient ponds can still be noticed. The Govindpur and Azamabad sites are located quite near a small stream known as Saraswati and also have depressions for ancient ponds. At Govindpur, the ancient pond still existed till a few years back. Since the ancient landscape has changed so much in the area that Kuṣāṇa period walls are observed 1–2 m deep from the ground level, it is very difficult to understand the nature of most of these water bodies, but it is undoubted that ancient water bodies in the form of ponds and wells were situated near these sites.

Now when we take a look at most of these sites, we observe that except for few small isolated sites considered as monastic ones, majority of them were multi-religious in nature which means that there must have been a concept of sacred areas. At the famous site of Kankali Tila, there were two or more Jaina *stūpas*, a Buddhist *stūpa*, a temple of the Sun god and an image of Skanda–Kārttikeya, and presence of some other Brāhmaṇical sculptures. Very close to Kankali Tila (still a popular Hindu place) are Balabhadra Kuṇḍa and the Bhuteshwar Mahadev Temple having quite early antiquity. From the vicinity of the Bhuteshwar Temple, a few Buddhist sculptures have also been reported. From the Katra site, sculptural evidence of all three sects—Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina—were found. From the Mahavidya Devi Temple site, evidence of the presence of Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical sects have been found. The Gokarneshwar Mahadev Temple site is a similar case, where there is still a popular tradition of Śiva worship at this temple and the nearby Nilakantheshwar Mahadev Temple. The Gokarneshwar colossus being worshipped as Śiva is possibly a Sūrya image. Few Buddhist and Jaina findings have also come to light from the same site along with a royal imagery. The site at Birjapur had a temple of Śrī-Lakṣmī near the ancient pond. Similar was the case with the site near the Jail mound from where the shrine of Nāga Dadhikarṇa is also known from inscriptions. By and large, a majority of the peripheral sites of the ancient city were of Buddhist affiliation. But along with Buddhism, whether these were affiliated to some local cult or Brāhmaṇism is not much clear. One reason for that may be the unscientific digging of most of such sites like Jamalpur/Jail mound, Magistrate's Court and House, etc. From Pali-Khera, Girdharpur, Mansa Tila, Maholi and Salempur, sculptures of both Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist affiliation have come to light. Buddhist sculptures would outnumber the Brāhmaṇical sculptures simply because most of the peripheral sites of the ancient city as well as small centres like Pali-Khera, Maholi, etc., were working as important centres of sculpture carving and also because these had some sort of Buddhist structures which could be excavated because of their particular locations. Mathura was also a great centre of sculpture carving for Brāhmaṇical and Jaina sects but their proportion was much less in comparison to Buddhist sculptures, possibly because of the demand of such sculptures. It can be well anticipated that the demand for stone sculptures grew out of the foreign influence. We have confirmed evidence of the supply of Mathura Buddhist sculptures as far as Kaushambi, Sarnath, Sanchi and Gandhara, but for Brāhmaṇical or Jaina images such evidence is still lacking. The spread of Brāhmaṇical sculptures made at

Mathura workshops or strongly influenced by it, is limited to areas of Braj (a cultural and geographical entity considered to be of later times) only, though that's a different issue that the Brāhmaṇical art of even as far areas as Eran and Vidisha had a strong Mathura influence. The finding of such a large number of Buddhist sculptures should not be taken as evidence of the popularity of Buddhism in the region, but rather as a great centre of stone carving. The stone carvers might have been followers of any faith of their choice which might be similar or different from their profession. A majority of early sculptures found from inside the ancient city are of Brāhmaṇical affiliation, but Buddhist and Jaina sculptures were also popular. It is just because of the sculptural evidence revealed from the peripheral sites that we are not in a position to form a proper idea of the religious life of ancient Mathura. I would only suggest looking at these findings as that of workshops and not as part of the religious life of the area of those times. Now, for certain sites, we do get inscriptional evidence mentioning them as a *vihāra* site. Whether this *vihāra* term was used for purely religious Buddhist edifices like we get from Nalanda, Vikramasila or for centres of sculpture carving where few monks might have resided, is to be delved in. Another possibility might be that such inscriptions were written at the place of carving and were to be exported to other places where the images were to be installed.

Another important observation which one can make from the study of find-spots of various Mathura sculptures is the fact that about 90–95 per cent of the Brāhmaṇical sculptures were found from the wells of Pali-Khera, Salempur, Isapur, Ganesh Tila, Kathoti Kuan and Saptasamudri, etc., and the Yamuna. The oldest sculptures were found in the same heap which contained medieval sculptures during the cleaning of a few wells at the initiative of people like Pt. Radha Krishna. It clearly means that these images were thrown into the water bodies after they had become defunct or irrelevant for worship. One cannot deny such possibilities deriving out of furious Muslim attacks on religious establishments. So, except for one or two instances like the Mora findings, most of the Brāhmaṇical images have been found out of their context. And if these three–four sites like Pali-Khera and Isapur are left aside, we do not have proper information about the Brāhmaṇical cults of ancient Mathura. The biggest drawback for a proper study of ancient Brāhmaṇical cults is the prevailing view in the Hindu society of throwing images into water bodies whenever some spoliation on them is observed. Finding of Brāhmaṇical images from water bodies should never be taken only to mean that these were associated with water in some way or the other. It is a different issue that every ancient settlement (also a religious one) would have some kind of water body in its vicinity. But spoiled or defunct images were deliberately thrown into the water bodies so that these could not be worshipped any longer. For a perfect idea of the association of a certain image with a water body, one must be aware of the fact whether it is being found in its original context or not.

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