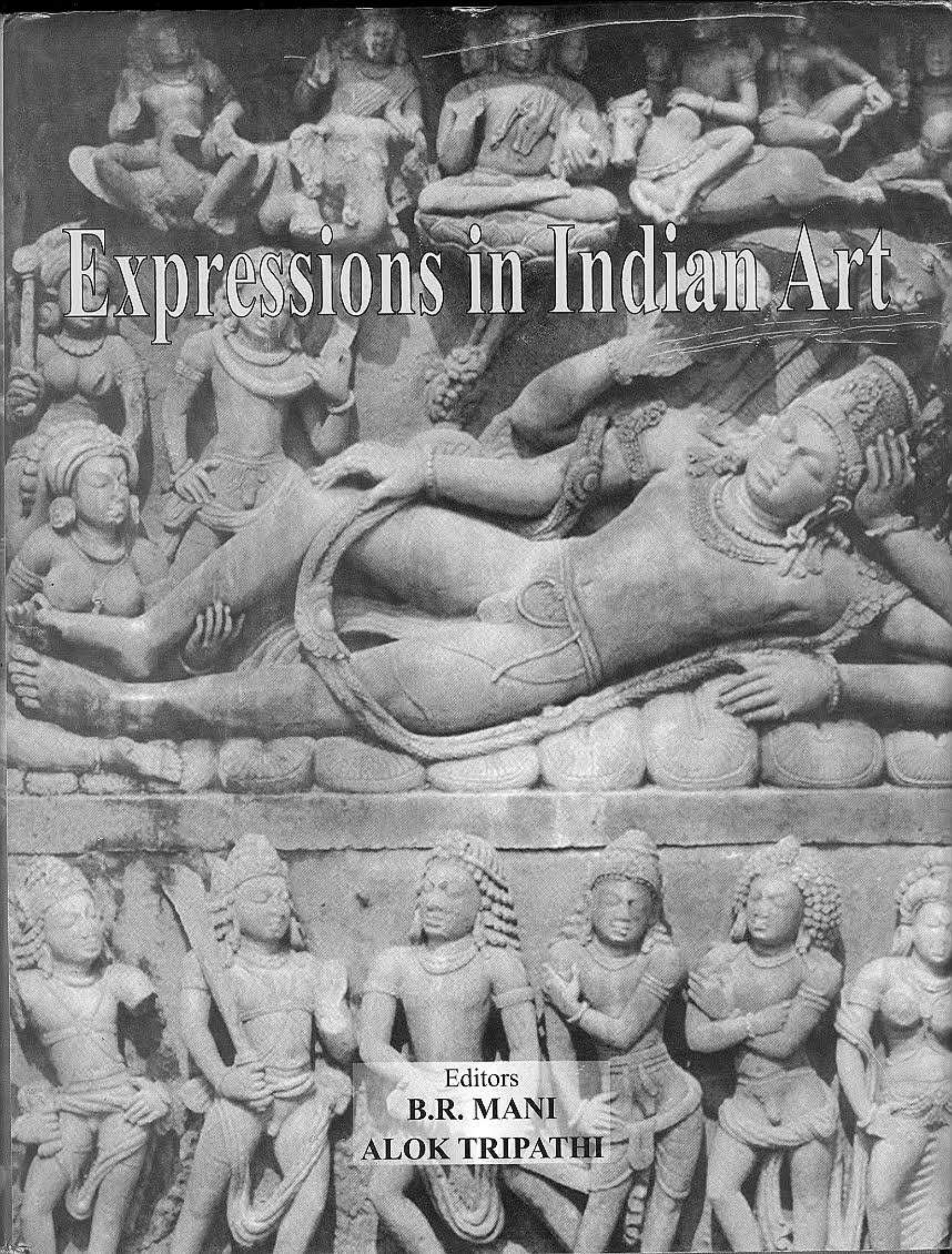




Expressions in Indian Art

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New Aspects of Late Period Mathura Terracottas

Vinay Kumar Gupta

In spite of the fact that a lot of work has been done on the sculptural art of Mathura, there lies a great scope for the work to be done on the terracotta art in general and later period terracottas in particular. Even if we take a look at the number of significant archaeological sites throughout India belonging to medieval period and providing good examples of terracotta art, our information would not be so encouraging.

This paper try to throw some light on the specimens of later period terracottas of Mathura region which came to notice during my investigations in the region. The north Indian archaeological sites of post 12th century are generally not associated with terracotta figurines except for a few specimens. Mathura region is also famous for early historical terracottas and for a few examples of early medieval period. But for the post 12th century period, finding of terracottas of various deities as well as human and animals is uncommon. The simple reason given for it is that ruling followers of Islam considered making any human figurine anti-religious. That's the reason that our knowledge of late medieval terracotta art is very limited.

Before discussing the terracottas, we should understand the nature and chronology of archaeological mounds where these specimens have been found. The number of such sites providing such figurines is quite limited. The location of the sites is as follows -

- Bhuteshwar mound
- Chamunda mound
- Viswa Laxmi Nagar mound, Govardhan bye-pass
- Chandrapuri railway crossing, Bharatpur road
- Mathurajunction mound, Maholi road
- Gokul mound
- Mahavana mound, Dauji road, and
- Sarai Ali Khan mound, near Mahavana

Three of these sites, Bhuteshwar, Chamunda and Mathura junction mounds have provided evidence Kushan period in the form of Buddhist sculptures, railing fragments and inscriptions.

After Kusana period how the cultural sequence of these sites developed, is not yet clear. During investigations we found the possibility of pre-Mauryan and Mauryan horizons in the form of black slipped ware and other related potteries, at the site of Bhuteshwar mound. At the Vishwa Laxmi Nagar, Triveni mound site I could differentiate between Kusana horizon having red color brickbats in compact yellow color soil, very much like other Kusana monastic sites of Buddhist nature with the loose deposit above it. A certain Kusana human terracotta figurine were also found from this horizon. A very sad fact came to notice that the famous excavated site of Girdharpur mounds, approximate 800 metres distant was completely destroyed by a group of powerful builders in connivance with police and other authorities. Girdharpur mounds had provided a large number of Kusana period Buddhist sculptures in the excavations conducted in 1920s. At other sites I could not find out any Kusana horizon, although there is a good possibility of it. As far as the latest horizon is concerned it could be upto 18th century, at least at the Triveni mound where some inscribed pottery with English letters was found, must have been an imported specimen from Europe.

A little attention can also be paid towards the nature of the deposit of these mounds which are almost identical in nature. These mounds have a height of approximate 9 metres if the mound has not gone through much destruction. The deposit appears to be of overburnt brick red color with ashy deposits in between. The whole deposit is very loose in nature. In the middle levels presence of post-Gupta stamped pottery indicates towards the possibility of post-Gupta deposit. Then the whole dating problem becomes very interesting after the finding of some lakhori brick square pillar like structures at these sites. This phase is accompanied by a large number of terracotta figurines, generally having overburnt appearance with a peculiar deposit covering their exterior. Most of the pottery found from here is overburnt with yellowish patches in between. Although no glazed ware could be found in the deposit but celadon and porcelin of various types as well as glass bangle pieces are present in the deposit of these mounds.

Among all the specimens now being discussed only one can be dated to Kusana period safely. It is a small red color broken headless human bust which was found from Triveni mound. It is wearing a beautiful *kanthahara* having pearl beads. It is the only early specimen found from that site.

All the terracotta figurines which would be discussed now, are very difficult to be assigned a particular period. A very broad chronological span should be presumed for these terracottas. Although, D.K. Chakrabarti assigned a date of early centuries of Christian era to these sites, the author, keeping in mind the views of B.R. Mani, is of the opinion that a broad time bracket ranging, between post-Gupta period to about 18 century should be assigned to these terracottas. Even in this broad time period, the most probable period seems to be 1200-1800 AD, because of the nature of the associated pottery which includes along with normal pottery, celadon and porcelin ware and even an imported European specimen.

A general assessment of the figurines for their common features and technology can be made now. Majority of terracottas are made of well lavigated clay and well fired. Over-burnt specimens are also quite often met with. As far as their making technology is concerned, almost all the specimens are mould made. A single mould was used to prepare an attractive front of the figurine. Back portion of almost all the figurines was left untouched as they were probably made to be looked from front side only. The normal color of the terracottas is red but dirty white color specimens also form a good proportion. Even some black color terracottas are also present. A whitewash like slip had been applied over the surface of most of the terracottas. The size of the terracottas varied within 2 to 7 cm.

Purpose of making most of the terracottas seems largely to be religious, some of the terracottas were made for the appeasement of children. Some of the terracottas can be termed as secular specimens too. A lot of classifications can be made for the study of these terracottas. Here the most suitable classification is being made for these terracottas As follows -

- Human figurines
- Animal figurines
- Other

Human Figurines

Human figurines can be further divided into male and female figurines. These can be further divided into divine, semi-divine and ordinary figurines. Description of these figurines is as follows-

Ganesh

There are two slightly broken figurines of Ganesh (pl. 38.1). The deity is shown four handed wearing a long garland. *Karanda mukuta* of the deity is quite visible in one of the specimens. He is sitting in the *udar-bandh mudra* which is common for the *ganas* as well as their head Ganesh. He is wearing a *dhoti* as visible in the space between his two legs. What was he holding in his four-hands is not clear, but his lower-right hand was resting on his right leg and was probably holding a lotus bud and his lower-left hand was in the process of putting some *laddu* like sweet in his long trunk which is running straight down. In his upper two hands he is possibly holding two of his *ayudhas* - *vajra* and *pash* (noose). In his left leg anklet is visible. The similarity of the two figurines indicate that these type of figurines were made in good numbers following a set pattern and were definitely part of those people's religious life.

Yakshas

There are four figurines which can be put in the category of *yakshas* (pl. 38.2). One among them is a *Kubera* figurine which is a sun baked brown color specimen. The height of it is about 3.5 cm. and he is shown sitting in *Bhadrasana*. He is shown sitting with his left leg knelt horizontally while his right leg is vertically bent. His left hand is shown resting on his left knee which probably hold some object in it. Two other figurines one in red color while the other one in dirty white color are either of a guardian deity i.e. *yaksha* or a protecting ruler as the broad chest of them indicates. The red color one is without any ornamentation while the dirty white color specimen is wearing a chest-band as well as a *kanthahara*.

Another such type of figurine is comparatively larger and better finished than the earlier figurines. The person is probably sitting in *padmasana* having his right hand resting on his right knee. Other features of it are missing except its well built physique. Head and hands of both are missing.

Crowned Figurines

In this category of terracottas, such figurines have been included which appears to be of some deity or of a royal personage. The crown over their heads is the proof of it. Six specimens belong to this category (pl. 38.3). One such specimen is an overburnt red color figurine of a person with an attractive *mukuta* (probably *kirita*) having his left hand in *kativinyastha mudra*. Other details of it are beyond recognition in the now available figurine of about 6 cm. height.

Another figurine of this type is very much like a royal personage from northwestern region which has a long oval face with a very sharp chin. It is wearing a folded turban with two circular folds and a large fan shaped one at the back of it.

The third specimen is quite interesting which has an oval face inside a halo like formation. Over this halo like formation a pitcher shaped finial is shown. The right hand of the figurine is shown supporting the pot on it's head. The sex of this figurine is very difficult to be ascertained.

Another figurine is a small head portion having a round face. Head-dress appears to be like that of an Arabian head-dress. Probably it formed part of some terracotta object. The other terracotta head is very much like that of an Indo-Greek ruler. It's head-dress is like a Roman helmet. It is having a round face having mould made mouth, eyes, etc.

Two more terracotta heads also need to be discussed here. These are without any crown. One red color specimen has a long face with sunken cheeks and eyes, very much like a pret. Head appears to have been shown bald. The other terracotta head in black color is a remarkable example of this period's terracotta art. It has an oval face with well marked features. Eyes are lenticular in shape with one of the eyes shown in a slightly slanting manner. The person is wearing a neckband with a central jewel in the center of the band.

Two Sectarian Terracottas

There are two terracottas which can be considered as religious one (pl. 38.4). One is a ill-fired brownish terracotta specimen with it's head and portion below waist broken. The most significant fact about it is that the deity represented here appears to be in *dharmachakrapravartana mudra*. It lacks any other detail like clothing, etc. On the basis of it's *mudra* it can be taken to be an image of Buddha which would be a very interesting aspect for this period's terracotta art as well as the religious nature of the people residing at these sites.

The other figurine is also broken from top and bottom. It is made up of white kaoline clay possibly. It's appearance is very much like a Hindu deity especially lord Hanuman. It is wearing a *dhoti* tied at it's waist. Folds of the *dhoti* have also been shown. It is wearing a necklace round it's chest. It's right-hand is holding some long object towards it's shoulder.

Three Peculiar Terracottas

One of these terracottas is a white kaoline specimen. The female is shown probably sitting on a very unique *mudha* like object or it might be a stylised representation of the female in a standing pose where her lower garment has been tied at her waist with thick folds of her drapery. Her head and hands are missing. She has been adorned with a necklace running in between her breasts as well as a garland running over her breasts. It is a very charming example of female representation. It's importance either as a female of secular nature or as a female deity can not be denied.

The second figurine is quite similar to the first in it's treatment. It is a red color terracotta specimen with broken head and hands. The treatment of the *lahanga* like lower garment is similar to the first figurine, tied at waist and having vertical folds. Three of the long *patties* of the *lahanga* are running down near the feet. It is wearing a round breast-band. Both of these figurines have a hollow circular base to be kept on some surface.

The third figurine is probably kaoline or of some unique clay. It's sex can not be determined because of it's broken nature. It also has a hollow circular base. It is wearing a long coat or skirt type lower garment whatever the case may be. Two anklets are adorning its feet. It would have been one of the most remarkable example of this period's terracotta art if complete.

Ordinary Human Figurines

There are about 8 specimens of human figurines (pl. 38.5), either male or female. One of these figurines is of a female. This red color terracotta can be identified as a female only on the basis

of the *juda* or the hair knot tied at the back. It's both the hands have been shown kept on its waist near the navel. It was made only upto the knees and then the circular base which is slightly recognizable. Another such figurine is of a male with head and lower portion below waist missing and the hands kept near its navel. One other such specimen is a very fragmentary portion of a male figurine.

Another male figurine of red color has either a buttoned or beaded upper garment in the middle as its peculiarity, otherwise it is too broken for a good description. There are two more male figurines, one in red and the other in brownish red.

One porcelaine made figurine in white and green color is quite interesting. Only the portion below knee has survived of it, in which a European couple wearing trouser is identifiable. It may be an example of imported European terracotta as one pottery piece found from the same site was also an imported specimen.

Broken Legs and Hands

One base of a human figurine with its feet with two anklets, one broken leg, one very fine leg probably in a dancing pose, all in red color and a white color hand of unprecedented craftsmanship with a hole at the shoulder portion can be included in this category (pl. 38.6).

Animal Figurines

After the human figurines, the next highest percentage is that of animal figurines at these sites (pl. 38.7). These are about 14 in number.

Ram

A red color ram figurine is very much like that of Rajput period terracottas. This figurine was found from Bhuteshwar mound. It has two horns, one of which is broken. It's goggled eyes with pinhole are very typical of this period terracottas. It has a very short tail and it's collared neck indicate towards it's domesticated nature. Another head portion of a ram with goggled pinholed eyes and horns has also been found.

Monkey

The small monkey figurine of red color is very much like a child's figurine. It has a small circular base and has a dwarf like body appearance. So it might be a dwarf figurine rather than being a monkey figurine.

Elephant

Two elephant trunks of good size and with slightly better finished outlook indicate towards the popularity of elephant figurines during that period.

Figurines of 4 different birds—one sparrow, one duck, one string driven bird with holes and an eagle have also been found from these sites alongwith a bull or cow head, an owl, a rat head and a horse head with holes. Presence of such number and types of animal and bird figurines indicate towards the popularity of such figurines among masses of that period residing at these sites.

Miscellaneous

Two Seals

Two seals, most probably of religious importance are quite interesting as such seals have not been reported till now. Both are round, red in color with similar type of marks. One is double the size of other one. These have two *pada-chinha* type of symbols over them. Over these *chinhas* similar type of material was applied which has left blackish marks over them.

One Broken Chakra

A broken *chakra* with spokes running from the center of it, is very significant indeed. As it is not a simple *chakra*, rather it formed part of some terracotta statue, either over the head of a *bharvahaka yaksha* or as a *ayudha* of lord Vishnu. It can be presumed because it is not round in shape, rather it has an oval shape with one of the sides running much longer and broken. Besides these a *mukuta*, a terracotta leaf and many small rings are important objects to be discussed.

Conclusion

The variety and the vivid nature of terracottas found from these sites in and around Mathura city indicate towards a continuing tradition of terracotta art in the region with a new and changed outlook. As not much information is available about such terracottas, it is just a humble beginning. The dating as well as the character of these terracottas is very interesting as well as confusing. Assigning such a broad time span for them may not be correct but as the pottery and other aspects of site formation are considered, it may not appear to be so vague. Because of the lack of previous data about them, my thoughts about them should only be considered as tentative, which can only be confirmed by an excavation at any of these better preserved sites. Some of the conclusions drawn are -

- Although the sites belong to an earlier period, the terracottas discussed above should date between 12th to 18th century.
- These terracottas indicate a rare aspect of local Hindu and Buddhist terracotta art during the rule of Islamic rulers over north India.
- Presence of porcelin and celadon at these sites and almost complete absence of glazed pottery is very significant to understand the basic nature of these sites.
- Almost all the terracottas are single mould made, only from the front side and generally have a circular and slightly hollow base to put them on some kind of surface.
- The majority of these terracottas appear to be of male figurine, various deities as well as princely people. After male terracottas the largest percentage is that of animal figurines of various types.
- Many of the figurines are quite unique in their features and in their treatment.
- Archaeological excavation at these sites can solve most of the problems related with these terracottas.
- Many of the terracottas have a certain European influence on them and the finding of an imported potsherd with inscribed bottom is worth mentioning.

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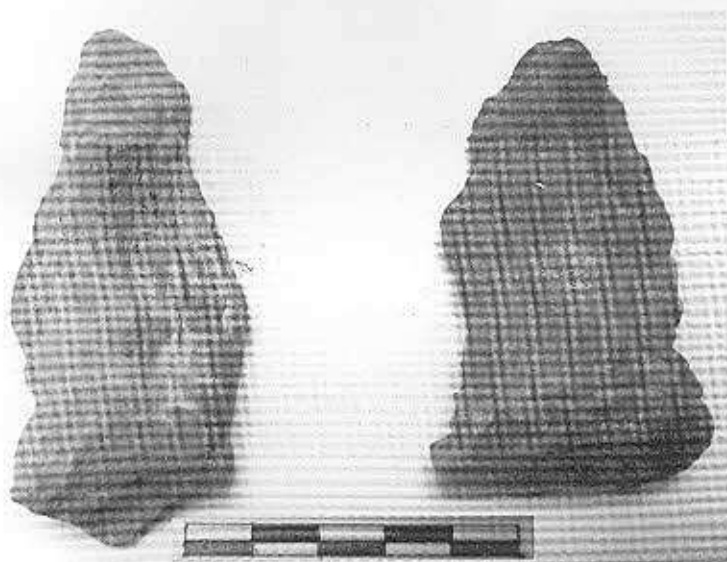
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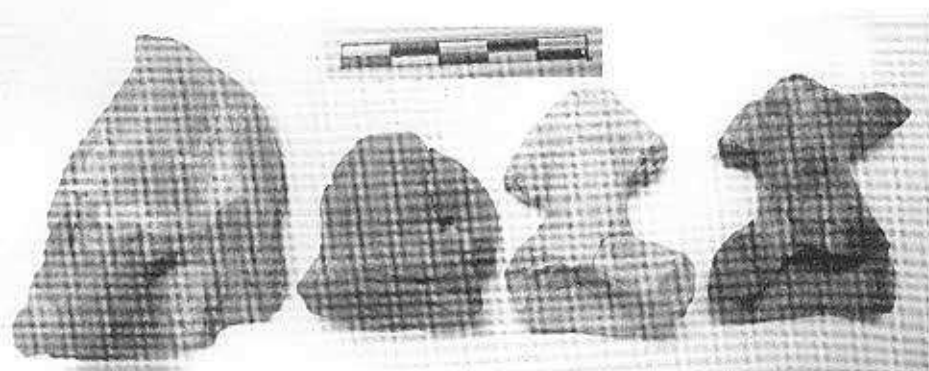
37.4 : Holalu : Brahma



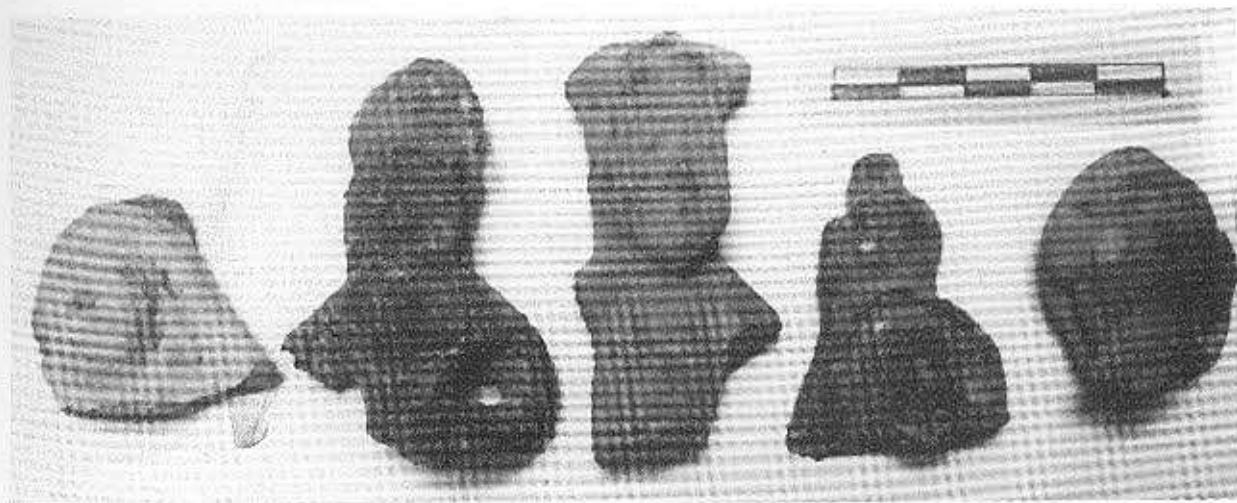
37.5 : Holalu : Lakshmi



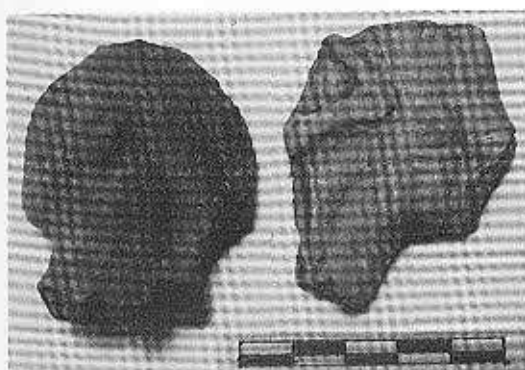
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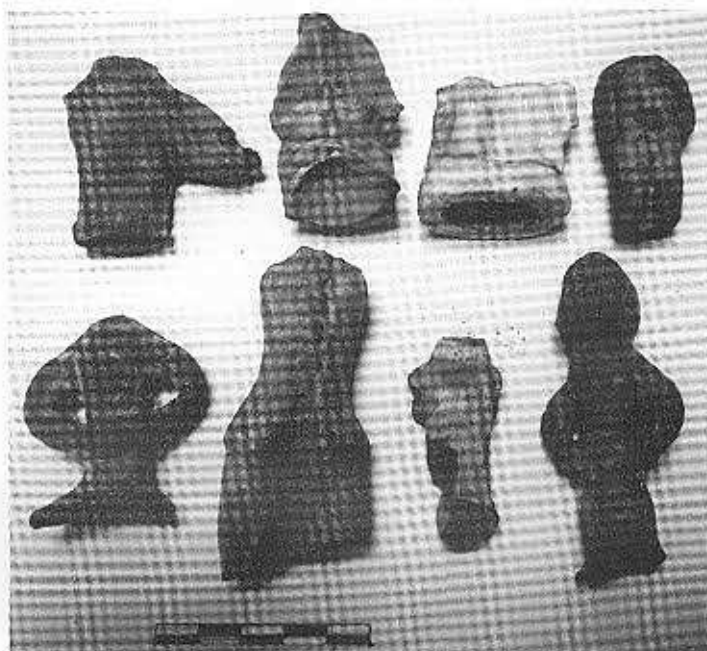
38.2 : Mathura : Yakshas



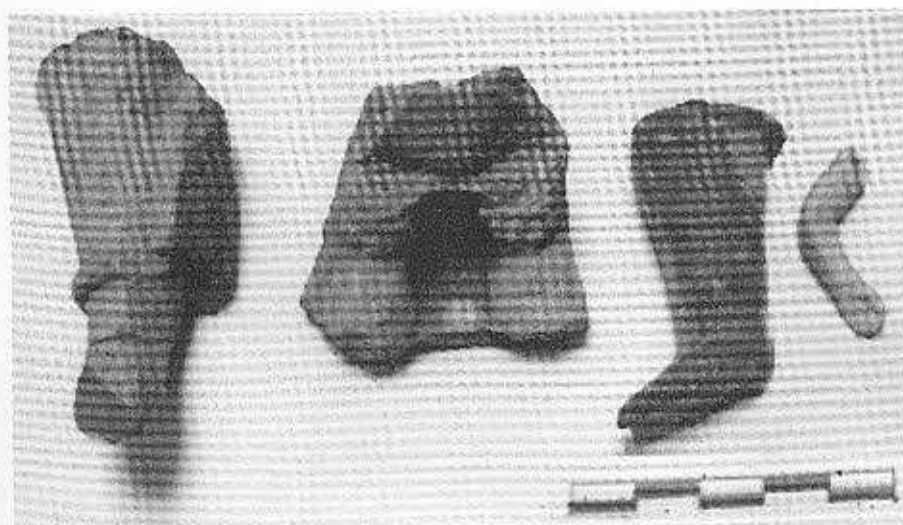
38.3 : Mathura : Crowned figurines



38.4 : Mathura : Sectarian figurines



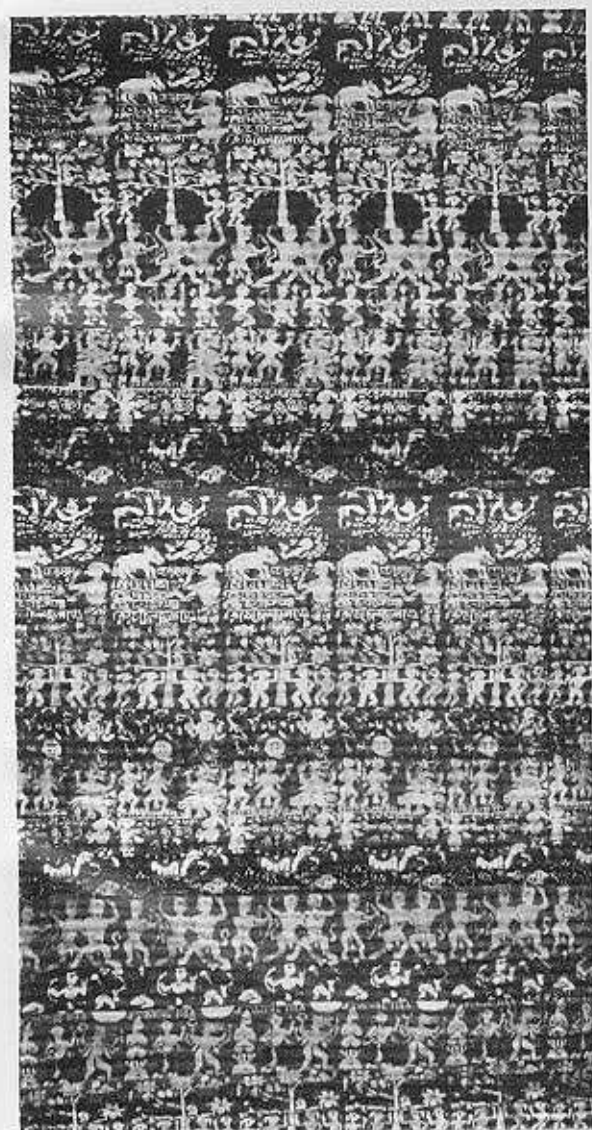
38.5 : Mathura : Human figurines



38.6 : Mathura : Broken parts of Human figurines



38.7 : Mathura : Broken parts of animal figurines



39.1 : Assam : Vrandavani vastra



40.1 : रानी की मृत्यु एवं हकीम, 1905-06 ई.