

History TODAY

No. 21, 2020

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Archaeology of Birjapur and Narhauili sites, Mathura

(With special reference to Birjapur inscription dedicated to Śrī)

Vinay Kumar Gupta

Mathura city and the region are so replete with archaeological sites that it becomes very difficult to look into each and every site comprehensively. This paper intends to focus on two such sites Birjapur and Narhauili (Pl. 1) which are both part of archaeological landscape of ancient Mathura city as well as have their independent existence and were important during the ancient past.

Birjapur (27.457552, 77.676375)

This is a small village on the present day National Highway No. 2 (Pl. 2) but till some decades back, this road was not there as it passed from inside the Mathura city either towards Agra or Delhi via Jamalpur and Aurangabad. There is a possibility that the present day Highway bypass route also follows some pre-existing local route. Anyhow, Birjapur site must have lied on the ancient route linking two ancient cities Mathura and Achhnera on the road to Gopadri (Gwalior) and Vidisha via Chandrapuri Crossing, Aruki, Bhainsa, Chhargaon, Sersa, Pilua Sadakpur, Beri, Parkham, Baroda and Kachaura (Gupta 2013: 113). Out of these, Parkham and Baroda are famous as the find-spots of huge Yakṣa sculptures of third century BCE, presently kept in the Mathura Museum (Acc. Nos. C 1 and C 2) and Chhargaon is known as the find-spot of Kushan period inscribed Nāga sculpture (Mathura Museum No. C 13). The ancient village of Narhauili is only about 500 m west of Birjapur site, so during the ancient times Birjapur might also have served the needs of the travelers moving toward the ancient road to Bharatpur passing via Narhauili. From Mathura city proper Birjapur is about 4 km south and if we take into account the site of Chandrapuri Crossing, then it is only 1.5 km distant from the latter. During explorations, the base of Mathura-Achhnera railway track was found to contain archaeological deposit dating back to the Painted Grey Ware and onward periods for about 0.5 km length from Chandrapuri Crossing towards Birjapur. The nature of destroyed site(s) is difficult to be ascertained because on both sides of the railway track there were brick kilns till four decades back. Because of the kilns no deposit is left behind in the low lying colonies of Chandrapuri, Natwar Nagar and Motikunj. Since the whole surrounding area is littered with Kushan period sites, it is almost guaranteed that there were few Kushan period sites scattered in these colonies. From the nearby

Mathura Junction area, some unidentified brick kilns and Dholi Pyau locality, a number of Buddhist sculptures are reported to have reached the Mathura Museum in the past.

It was in the year 1979 that the importance of Birjapur as an archaeological landmark came to light during the tenure of Dr R.C. Sharma as the Director of Mathura Museum when an important inscription (Pl. 3) was found there and deposited in the museum (Sharma 1989: 308-315). Dr Sharma somehow misspelt the name of village as Mirzapur in stead of Birjapur. Perhaps it was not his fault since it took me some time to understand the exact name of the village as Birjapur in spite of residing nearby. In fact the masons who constructed my house were from Birjapur and Narhauili villages only. This is a fact that Birjapur and Narhauili villages were out and out Scheduled Caste villages till few decades back and were famous for their construction masons in Mathura before the arrival of masons from Bundelkhand region. There is a possibility that the villagers are descendants of the people who occupied the villages during the early centuries of the Common Era as master artists of Mathura School of sculpture but due to decline of profession of sculptural art changed their profession over the centuries to become construction masons.

Coming back to the finding of the inscription from Birjapur, it is important here to mention that after the inscription slab reached the museum, the site was visited by Dr Sharma in the company of Shri Krishna Devji, two great Indologists. During those decades, Birjapur was a small hamlet with few houses on three sides of a pond, the fourth side was bound by the Mathura-Achhnera metre gauge (now electrified broad gauge track). It was from a *mandir bagichi* situated to the north of this pond that during leveling of the ground the rectangular slab with inscription was found almost on surface. Without examining the details provided by Dr Sharma, I had concluded after my frequent exploratory visits to the village that the present day *pokhar* must have been the *puṣkariṇī* referred to in the inscription (Gupta 2013: 50). Due to nation wide lockdown related to COVID 19, I used to walk up to that village and tried to again locate the structures as mentioned in the inscription as well as to corelate the observations made by Dr Sharma (Sharma 1989: 308-315) as well as Prof. D.C. Sircar (Sircar 1989: 257-260) in respect of it. Firstly we should take a look at the inscription which as per Dr. Sharma (1989: 308) reads:

L.1 Svāmisya Mahākṣatrapasya Śundāsasya gāṃjavarasya Brāhmaṇasya

L.2 Śegravasa gotrasya Mūlavasusya bhāryāye Vasusya mātare

L.3 Kauśikīye Pākṣakāye kārītā puṣkaraṇi imāṣam yamaḍa pu-

L.4 ṣkaraṇinām pūrvā puṣkaraṇi ārāmo sabhā udapāno stambho śiriye pratimā

L.5 ye śilā paṭṭo ca

Translation: During the reign of Svāmī Mahākṣatrapa Śuṇḍāsa (Śoḍāsa), Kauśikī Pākṣakā, the wife of his gāṃjavara (probably the treasurer or store keeper) Mūlavasu and mother of Vasu, Brāhmaṇas of Śegrava gotra, got erected the eastern water tank out of the twin tanks, a garden, an assembly, a well, a pillar, an image of Śrī and this inscribed slab.

Dr Sharma was quite brilliant in finding out a somewhat similar inscription from Luders' list (Luders 1961: 99-100, Ins. No. 64). The slab bearing the inscription was found from Jamalpur or the Jail mound in 1860s by Sir Alexander Cunningham. The whereabouts of the inscription are not known, though as per Luders (1961:99) the inscription was previously reported by Dowson, Cunningham, Growse, Buhler (who wrongly reported its find-spot as Kankali Tila) and Luders himself. The reading and translation of this inscription as per Prof. Luders (1961: 99-100) are as follows:

1 svāmisya mahākṣatrapasya Śoṃḍāsasya gaṃjavareṇa brāhmaṇena Śegravasagotreṇa [p]. (...)

2. raṇi imāṣam yamaḍapuṣkaraṇinām paścimā puṣkaraṇi udapāno ārāmo stambho i (..)

3. [śilā] paṭṭo ca --

Translation: By the treasurer of *svāmin mahākṣatrapa* Śoṃḍāsa, a Brāhmaṇa of the Śegrava (*Śaigrava*) gotra, a tank, the western tank of these twin tanks, a reservoir, a grove, a pillar, and this (?) stone-slab (were caused to be made).

From the analysis of both the inscriptions following facts can be noted:

The ruler of Mathura at the time of both the donations was Svāmī Mahākṣatrapa Śuṇḍāsa (Śoḍāsa). The person holding the important post of treasurer under the Śaka ruler was a Brāhmaṇa of Śaigrava gotra named Mūlavasu. Both the donations were in all probability made by the the lady and gents of the family respectively whose names from the Birjapur inscription are clear as Mūlavasu and his wife Kauśikī Pākṣakā; here Pākṣakā might be her proper name and Kauśikī her father's Brāhmaṇa gotra. This would be the earliest reference to Kauśika gotra

outside the ancient Indian literature¹ and name of the lady also suggests that the *gotra* of lady's father in the name continued to be mentioned post-marriage. Their son Vasu was also of some repute but had not acquired a higher stature in the administration by then. Here Śaigrava *gotra* needs some consideration as this *gotra* is absent in the present day Brāhmaṇa *gotras*. D.D. Kosambi (1963: 199) tries to associate it with Śṛgu tribe of the *Ṛgvedic* (RV 7.18) Ten Kings' War. Luders (1961: 100) writes that the Gaṇapāṭha of the Śaigrava *gotra* is referred to by Pāṇini in 2, 4, 67 and 4, 1, 104, and H. Kern has identified Śaigrava with Pali *Siggava*, the name of the patriarch who conferred the *upasampadā* ordination on the great Tissa Moggaliputta. If we take a look at the language of both the inscriptions, it is mixed Sanskrit-Prakrit. The Birjapur inscription uses *ṣaṣṭhī vibhakti* for most of the words (-sya) in Lines 1 and 2. The Jamalpur mound inscription has used *ṭṛtīyā vibhakti* for most such words in the Line 1 because of which Prof. Luders had the belief that the donor was the *gaṃjavara* (Mūlavasu). Prof. Sircar (1989: 259) seems quite right in suggesting that the letters lost at the end of line 1 are no less ten in number, which apparently read *Mūlavasunā kārītā puṣka*.

Dr. Sharma and Prof. Sircar (*op. cit.*) made a wrong impression that both inscriptions should belong to a single site as they believed that the subject matter in both the inscriptions was quite similar. Since the inscriptions referred to the commission of an eastern and a western tank, they considered that it should refer to a single site. Incomplete information can lead to wrong conclusions and it can happen to even the best of scholars. When we take a look at Birjapur site, it is true that the observations of Dr. Sharma and Shri Krishna Devji (Sharma 1989: 310) were correct at least in identifying the land features. There is of course a village *pokhar* which in all probability would have been an ancient pond of the time of Śaka-Kushans but we don't see any ancient brick there and it is always filled with rain water and the dirty sewage. Dr. Sharma also did not report any such finding from there. But such ancient ponds are observed throughout Braj and there is no harm in considering it the eastern *puṣkariṇī*. To the west of this village *pokhar* just across the railway track, there was a huge depression and at present a large mud embankment has been constructed there, probably by Indian Army who owns the land. The ground level of this depression is much higher than the eastern *pokhar*. Unfortunately, no ancient remains were reported in the past and nothing is available on the surface. But this might have

¹ Two more inscriptions from Mathura mention Kauśikī, one of them is the same Kauśikī Pākṣakā, the mother of Vasu, though the latter is only mentioned as Kauśikīputra (Luders 1961: 155, Inscription no. 115) and other one is a Jaina inscription from Kankali Tila which mentions Kauśikiye Śivamitrā (Luders 1961: 49, Inscription no. 18).

been the western tank, reference of which we can take from the Birjapur inscription because if there is an eastern tank out of twin tanks, the other tank must have been the western tank. One fact is simply remarkable that land use of Śāka-Kushan period is still somehow and somewhat intact. The inscription was found from the boundary of the *mandir bagichi* just adjacent to northern limit of the eastern tank. The inscription mentions of an assembly, a well, a grove, an image of Śrī and the stone slab. The temple and the residence of the priest are located at a corner inside a small grove (7 acres land in past) and there is an old well too, though nothing ancient survives due to new constructions. Without the finding of any pottery, sculpture or structure it may be difficult to take all the evidence as they are but I have no doubts in taking them as they are because of the location of the site in the archaeological landscape of Mathura. As has already been mentioned that this site lies on the ancient route linking Mathura city sites with Aruki site, besides it also lies on a perpendicular route linking Narhauili to Tantura, Army helipad area sites as reported by me earlier (Gupta 2009) and then sites towards Gokul and Jamalpur Tila, all the sites datable to at least Śāka-Kushan period. On further enquiry at the bagichi, just adjacent to the ancient well (completely renovated with modern bricks) towards the pond side, I found bunker like rooms cut out in hard natural soil. The activity seems very old and an old Hanumān idol (Pl. 4) is kept there for worship. I believe the level of these underground chambers might be the same as the ancient Śāka-Kushan period ground level outside the tank and with the passage of time, the present day ground level has got elevated. One big red sandstone slab possibly part of ancient tank or a structure was found lying in the *bagichi*. On enquiry the villagers told that it was found in digging on the periphery of pond. No other ancient remains were observed but the antiquity of the site was confirmed when the villagers told that large size bricks matching Kushan period brick size are found sometimes during diggings. This little information confirms the previously held view of Dr. Sharma and me that the *pokhar* is the same as mentioned in the Birjapur inscription. Due to repeated visits at the site, I could notice few ancient bricks on surface inside the western depression (Pl. 5). Exact brick size was not clear even after scrapping but the size appeared to be large, similar to Kushan bricks. So, the Śāka-Kushan antiquity of the ponds is confirmed, though, with limited archaeological evidence.

An interesting issue related to Birjapur slab inscription was highlighted by Dr. Sharma (1989: 311) when he noticed the figure of a headless bull at the end of the epigraph. Shri Krishna Devji and Dr. Sharma rightly pointed out that the figure predated the present inscription and in

that case the stone slab was larger and possibly belonged to some Śaiva shrine. The view of Dr. Sharma suggesting some sectarian rivalry between the Śaivas and Bhāgavatas at Mathura on the basis of reuse of Birjapur inscription slab may be kept in abeyance due to absence of any evidence in that regard. At present on the site exists a Śiva temple. There is a possibility that this few centuries old temple might have come up at the site in continuation of an earlier Śiva temple. May be during the Śaka-Kushan period, the other deity associated with the site along with Śrī was Śiva only. It also needs to be mentioned that the identification of the figure as that of a bull is not full proof and this engraving might have been much earlier than Śaka-Kushan period in some different context than purely Śaivite.

Now, we may look at the fact whether the inscription found at Jamalpur or Jail mound belonged to that site or was it transported from Birjapur to Jamalpur as opined by Dr. Sharma and Prof. Sircar (*op. cit.*). Just to clarify that Jamalpur mound is sometimes mentioned as the Jail mound because before the construction of Mathura Collectorate the site housed the Mathura Jail. The present Mathura Jail is also situated in proximity to the Collectorate on archaeological debris. Coming back to the question raised above, Dr. Sharma suggested that there was no depression at the Jamalpur site but during my explorations in the area I had observed that there were depressions in the back side of Mathura Jail and Jamalpur mound, though, it remains a fact that the landscape of the Jamalpur (or then Jail) mound has completely changed due to the construction of Mathura Collectorate, occupying a large area. The heart bleeds when one thinks that the most important administrative complex of Mathura is standing on the corpse of one of the greatest heritage sites of not only Mathura but India. The most important evidence of the presence of at least a tank at the site of Jamalpur is confirmed by three inscriptions found from Jamalpur mound. Inscription No. 65 of Luders' list (1961: 101-102) found from the site of Huviṣka Vihāra at Jamalpur mentions the setting up of the cooking stone of the Kākaṭikas in their vihāra in a park at Śrīkuṇḍa (tank of Śrī). The other evidence comes from the Inscription No. 27 of Luders' list (1961: 62-63) again found from Jamalpur which mentions the setting up of a stone slab at the shrine of the holy lord of Nāga Dadhikarṇa by the boys, chief among whom is Nandibala, the son of the actors of Mathurā, known as Cāndaka brothers. It is almost certain that during ancient times, a Nāga shrine was erected only in the vicinity of a water body, so this inscription again confirms the presence of a sacred water body at Jamalpur site. Here it may also be emphasized that out of hundreds of inscriptions from Mathura, this is a rare inscription which

mentions the name of city Mathurā. Inscription No. 34 of Luders' list (1961:70) obtained from Huviṣka Vihāra at Jamalpur again makes reference to the shrine of Dadhikarṇṇa. In his report for years 1862-65, General Cunningham (1971: 238f) mentioned that in 1863 he found the name of the "Kunda-Suka-Vihāra" on a large flat slab of stone unearthed from the "Jail Mound". This information further confirms that at the site of Jamalpur there was a tank because of which the Buddhist monastery was called Kuṇḍa-Śuka. When we take a look at the Google imagery of Mathura Collectorate or survey on ground, a huge *pokhar* can still be seen in its north-west just adjacent to Swarg Marg of Army area. This might be one of the historical tanks.

The mound at Jamalpur has provided one of the biggest repositories of Buddhist sculptures in India which is scattered among the collections of the Mathura Museum, Lucknow Museum and the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The two masterpieces of Indian art, certainly representing the pinnacle of Mathura art during the Gupta period, the standing Buddha image (Mathura Museum No. A 5) carved by master artist Yaśadinna and the standing Buddha image in the Ashok Hall of Rashtrapati Bhawan were acquired from Jamalpur. Prior to that, the site boasted of the royal Huviṣka Vihāra during the Kushan period. The study of the above three inscriptions from Jamalpur makes it clear that Jamalpur site prior to the establishment of Huviṣka Vihāra was important for the presence of Śrīkuṇḍa and a shrine of Nāga Dadhikarṇṇa. Prof. Vogel (1930: 23) and Prof. Luders (1961: 59) have also opined that the shrine of Nāga Dadhikarṇṇa were earlier than the Huviṣka Vihāra. This would mean that the great Buddhist establishment came up at an important pre-existing Brāhmaṇical site and possibly co-existed with it. If all major Buddhist sites in Mathura are analysed, it may come up as a pattern that these sites were pre-existing and were generally Brāhmaṇical in nature. Buddhist religious establishments came up at these sites in harmonial conditions only. It is also a fact that Buddhist establishments acquired the major areas of such sites and the Buddhist antiquities outnumber the Brāhmaṇical antiquities. Jamalpur was not only a great Buddhist establishment during the Kushan and Gupta periods but possibly was also a workshop for making stone sculptures.

From the above study, it becomes clear that at least one of the ponds at Jamalpur was known as Śrīkuṇḍa. It is really interesting to note that at least one of the ponds at Birjapur might also have been called as Śrīkuṇḍa because the inscription from there mentions the setting up of an image of Śrī along with the tank, well, assembly and grove. It is highly likely that a shrine of goddess Śrī was also there if so much work was being done in the name of the goddess. Almost

similar nature of Śrīkuṇḍa site can be presumed at Jamalpur too. The lady Kauśikī Pākṣakā and her husband Mūlavasu must have been ardent followers of goddess Śrī (Lakṣmī). Both the inscriptions from Birjapur and Jamalpur talk of eastern and western tanks respectively. It can be deduced from the subject matter of the inscriptions that the other tank of the twin tanks at both the sites might have been dedicated to another deity. If so, who it could be? In all probability it should either have been the husband of goddess Śrī (Lakṣmī) Viṣṇu/ Vāsudeva or Śiva as the present day temple at Birjapur indicate. But without any supportive evidence not much should be speculated about it. Both Prof. Sircar and Dr. Sharma did not take the available inscriptions from Jamalpur mound into consideration, otherwise they would not have formed the opinion that a somewhat resembling dedicatory deed cannot be made at two different locations. It should also be noted that one cannot repeat the same dedicatory references at the same spot, if only the tanks varied. Whatever words might be missing from the Jamalpur inscription, it seems that it also made reference to an image of Śrī because the tank at Jamalpur was named Śrīkuṇḍa.

The issue whether the Birjapur inscription refers to the installation of an image of Śrī (Lakṣmī) or the *śilā paṭṭa* itself served this purpose may also be taken note of. Dr. Sharma (1989: 310) believed that the language of the words in the last line of the inscription indicates that it refers to the *śilā paṭṭa* itself and not an image. Moreover he took the *śrīvatsa* motif in bas relief at the beginning of the inscription as a representation of Śrī (Lakṣmī). Here it is pertinent to mention that Śrī (Lakṣmī) was one of the most popular deities in the art of ancient Mathura and its antiquity goes back to even Mauryan times (Gupta 2013a: 53-72). There can be no doubt that the Birjapur inscription refers to an image of Śrī (Lakṣmī) and not to the slab for that purpose as was suggested by Dr. Sharma.

There is one more inscription popularly understood as Vāsudeva *mahāsthāna* inscription from Mathura (Mathura Museum No. 13.367) which is related to the family of Kauśikī Pākṣakā. This inscription was found engraved on the side of a carved door-jamb dug out of an old well from the *kothi* of Rai Bahadur Pt. Radhakrishna in Mathura Cantonment area in 1913. Prof. Luders (*EI* XXIV: 208-210) translated the inscription as follows:

... by Vasu, a gateway of stone (?) and the railing was erected at the ---- of the great temple of *bhagavat* Vāsudeva. May *bhagavat* Vāsudeva, being pleased, promote (the dominion or the life and strength) of Svāmin Mahākṣatrapa Śoḍāsa.

In his reading of the inscription, Prof. Luders also read *Kauśikīputreṇa*, though it was not properly legible to him. Prof. Luders had made the right judgement and it was proven after the find of Birjapur inscription which mentions Kauśikī Pākṣakā as the mother of Vasu and in this Vāsudeva *mahāsthāna* inscription Vasu is the main donor. The inscription was brought to its find-spot from somewhere else in Mathura in the first half of nineteenth century. Prof. Luders believed that it would have come from Mora, the famous site of Vṛṣṇis some 14 km distant from Mathura Cantonment whereas Prof. Agrawala (1939: 33) believed it to have come from Shri Krishnajanmabhumi site (Katra Keshavdev) as it referred to *mahāsthāna* of Vāsudeva. If *mahāsthāna* means the birth-place of Vāsudeva, then Prof. Agrawala's view must be accepted but if *mahāsthāna* only means a great sacred place or temple, then there can be other possibilities in Mathura. A good number of Vāsudeva idols of the Kushan period including the *caturvyūha* image have been found from Mathura, any of them might have been an idol belonging to a great sacred place. Wherever this *mahāsthāna* of Vāsudeva might have been situated in Mathura, it confirms the tradition of considering Mathura as the birthplace of Vāsudeva and the family of Mahāvasu, Kauśikī Pākṣakā and Vasu as the flag bearer of Brāhmaṇism in Mathura during the rule of Śaka-kṣatrapas.

Narhauili (27.459357, 77.666100)

Narhauili (also Naroili/ Narholi) is the first village after Mathura on the ancient route going towards Gujarat and Malwa via Bharatpur, Uchchen and Bayana. Unlike Birjapur which was more of a small religious/ *dharmasālā* kind of settlement with few habitations or workshops coming up at some later time, Narhauili was a proper village habitation with religious/ workshop sites on periphery. Narhauili is about 3 km south of ancient walled city and just 1 km south of Chandrapuri Crossing site and Mathura Junction Loco Shed site. Narhauili village is situated atop an ancient site which is about 160 m north-south, 100 m east-west and about 7 m high at certain points. In the west, Delhi-Mumbai railway track restricts the site and in east Delhi-Chennai track; in between Mathura-Bharatpur Highway bisects the site. In fact, a considerable chunk of ancient site would have been lost due to construction of railway tracks in its west. During my earlier explorations, I had observed ancient pottery near the railway crossing of the village but because of road construction and recent colonization, such remains are no more visible. The pottery

assemblage also comprised pre-Kushan pottery including grey ware and reddish brown ware. In all probability, the site may date back to Painted Grey Ware period as are Maholi and Pali-khera. All three sites are of somewhat similar nature and are almost equidistant from ancient walled city, though Maholi is a quite bigger site. In fact Kushan remains are found either on natural ground level or even at lower levels in this area. It seems that in the past two thousand years the natural ground level has gone up. There are three ancient ponds at Narhauili site, one each on the north and south ends and one toward the west (Pl. 6). At many ancient sites in Braj two or more ancient water tanks are observed but at Narhauili site, it is significant to note that the area of the site is not that big and in spite of that there are three ancient water bodies present at the site, the southern *pokhar* is considerably large. It is difficult to ascertain the landscape of the area prior to the construction of the railway tracks and the elevation of Bharatpur road near its junction with the present day National Highway No. 2 but there must have been several Buddhist monastic or workshop sites in the area which has been occupied by the Indian Railways and Army. Actually, development work either in the form of National Highway bypass road or the railway tracks and Army establishments led to large scale destruction of sites in the area. No details are available of that destruction. From Narhauili itself, two significant sculptures were acquired, one in 1919 and the other one subsequently in 1922-23 but no information about the nature of exact find-spot is available. It is possible that these two were acquired from some *Mātā Maṭh* in Narhauili village.

One of these finds is a railing pillar (Mathura Museum No. 19.1595, Pl. 7) of the Kushan period representing a beautiful damsel holding *caurīs* in both her hands. The lady figure defines feminine beauty with supple breasts, slender waist, heavy pelvic and jewelry ornaments. She is adorned with a two-stringed torque, three beaded girdle, beautiful earrings and ornamental bangles in her hands and feet. Her vaginal portion is deliberately exposed in spite of the fact that she is shown wearing a transparent *dhotī*. She is shown standing in *tribhaṅga mudrā* and her hair is arranged in beautiful trefoil. She might have been shown standing on a dwarfish figure but portion below her ankles is missing. Top portion of this railing pillar depicts a railing topped by an arch. The condition of this railing pillar does not indicate that it got buried in leather hard condition, so in all probability it embellished a Buddhist religious establishment situated somewhere at Narhauili.

The other important find from Narhauili is a Bacchanalian group of the Kushan period. It was Prof. V.S. Agrawala (2003: 151) who informed that a Bacchanalian group published by

Ramaprasad Chanda in the Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India for the year 1922-23 comes from Narhauri and is housed at the Indian Museum, Kolkata. Dr. Chanda (1922-23: 167, Pl. XXXVIII b) writes “the group measures 2 feet by 1 foot 9 inches and has a partially damaged bowl on the top. Evidently there were sculptures both on obverse and reverse of this piece. The obverse has been badly mutilated, but four female figures all wearing heavy ring anklets are recognizable. The half-kneeling female figure in the middle is evidently intoxicated. Her left hand is placed on the shoulders of a girl and her right hand is held by a male on the right. There are traces of another figure behind this male”.

It appears that Dr. Chanda has mixed the obverse and reverse features while describing the Bacchanalian group as Prof. Agrawala (2003: 151) informs that this specimen was similar to another Bacchanalian group found from Maholi (Pl. 8 a & b), though somewhat mutilated. That Maholi specimen was sent by the Mathura Museum for an exhibition in Delhi and that specimen along with the entire exhibition collection became part of prized collection of the National Museum, N. Delhi at the time of its foundation. Dr. C. Sivaramamurti (1979: 9-11) quite convincingly established that the reverse of this piece depicted a scene from Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭikam* in which Vasantasenā, the most beautiful courtesan of Ujjainī is trying to run away from crooked Sakara by covering the floral wreath on her head and tightening up the anklets to her knees to prevent them from jingling while she ran. Sakara's friend Viṭa who supported Vasantasenā in this cause is shown to the front and Sakara is shown hiding behind Viṭa. A lady attendant in the middle is shown holding a *chatra* for Vasantasenā. Dr. Asthana (1999: 93) has described the obverse of Maholi specimen in following words “On the obverse a young and beautiful damsel, probably a courtesan, is shown highly drunk in half kneeling posture. She is supported by a tall handsome male figure, probably her lover, on her right side and her left hand rests on the shoulder of a *kubjikā* girl who holds a goblet in her hand. Opposite the youth stands an old woman (*kuṭṭinī*) looking at her mistress with great sorrow”. In my opinion the obverse scene of Maholi and Narhauri specimens should also depict a scene either from the life of most famous Ujjainī courtesan Vasantasenā as shown on reverse or the most famous Mathurā *ganikā* Vāsavadattā of *Svapnavāsavadattā* fame.

Here it is important to note that a total five Bacchanalian groups have been found from Mathura environs. The first one is the so called Silenus group found by Col. Stacy in 1836 from somewhere in Mathura which is now in display at the Indian Museum, Kolkata. This specimen

has a lot of Hellenistic impact. The second specimen of this group was found from Pali-khera and is now in display at the Mathura Museum (Acc. No. C 2), this group is more Indianised. The third and fourth specimens are the above-mentioned Narhauili and Maholi groups. Both these specimens are very much Indian in treatment. Here it is pertinent to mention that an exact copy of the reverse side of Maholi and Narhauili Bacchanalian group (the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* scene) is reproduced in the upper panel of a jamb fragment (Mathura Museum No. 14.371) which was obtained from a well at Kankali Tila in Mathura. In true sense, this scene on doorjamb cannot be put under the category of Bacchanalian scenes. The fifth specimen was published by Carter (1982: 247-257) which is a certain Mathura product but completely Hellenistic in treatment. Of these five, we know the find-spots of three Bacchanalian specimens. These are Pali-khera, Maholi and Narhauili. All these sites are situated in a circle around ancient walled city and are equidistant from the latter. Pali-khera is about two km west of Maholi and Maholi is about 2 km west of Narhauili, hence Pali-khera is about 4 km west of Narhauili. The finding of Pali-khera and Maholi Bacchanalian specimens was reported from Buddhist convents, the Maholi specimen was for sure found from Khaṇḍa Vihāra in close proximity to the Maholi Bodhisattva image (Mathura Museum No. 39.2798). It is very much probable that the above described two finds from Narhauili were part of some Buddhist convent. Their quite degenerated condition indicates their long use as part of structure and worship. The Narhauili Bacchanalian group must have a bowl atop it to store some liquid related to Buddhist monks residing in the monastery or to perform some sort of ritual in the monastery.

During my explorations, I could locate an isolated Kushan period site (27°27'41.9"N, 77°39'59.3"E, Pl. 9) outside Narhauili village to its north-west (Gupta 2009: 35). The Delhi-Mumbai railway track is running to its east. The western pond of Narhauili is actually situated just to the south of this site, a temple and bagichi are situated in between. This site is situated almost at the surrounding ground level but Kushan period brick structures (Pl. 10) are visible on surface. On enquiry, I could get to know that the area of the site comes under the jurisdiction of Indian Railways. The area of ancient structural activity is limited and pottery on surface is minimal, though stone chips are scattered on the surface. Since the site seems very promising and size is not big, it may be taken up for excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India as soon as possible. Unfortunately, no such site has been excavated systematically in Mathura, so it would turn out to be an important and fruitful excavation to understand the nature of such sites.

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Acknowledgement: Shri Kanhaiyya Lal Saini, Surveyor, ASI for preparing the maps and my Guru Dr B.R. Mani for taking interest in the work.



Pl. 3. Birjapur inscription.



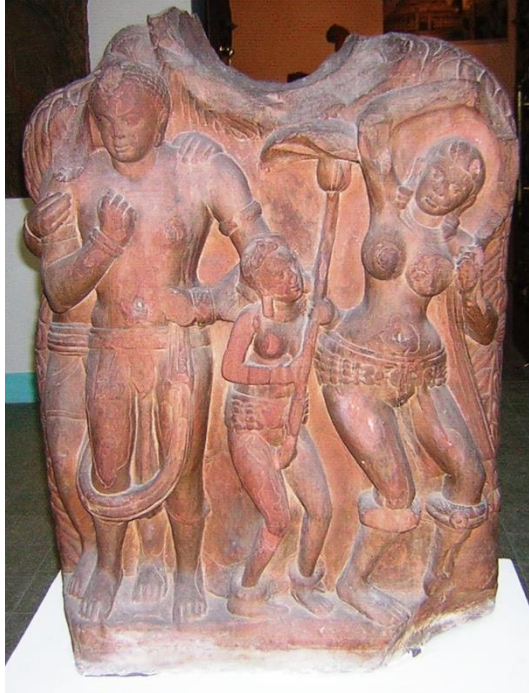
Pl. 4. Hanuman idol, Bagichi, Birjapur



Pl. 5. Ancient bricks, western depression, Birjapur.



Pl. 7. Railing pillar from Narhau.



Pl. 8a. Maholi bacchanalian group, obverse.



Pl. 8b. Maholi bacchanalian group, reverse.

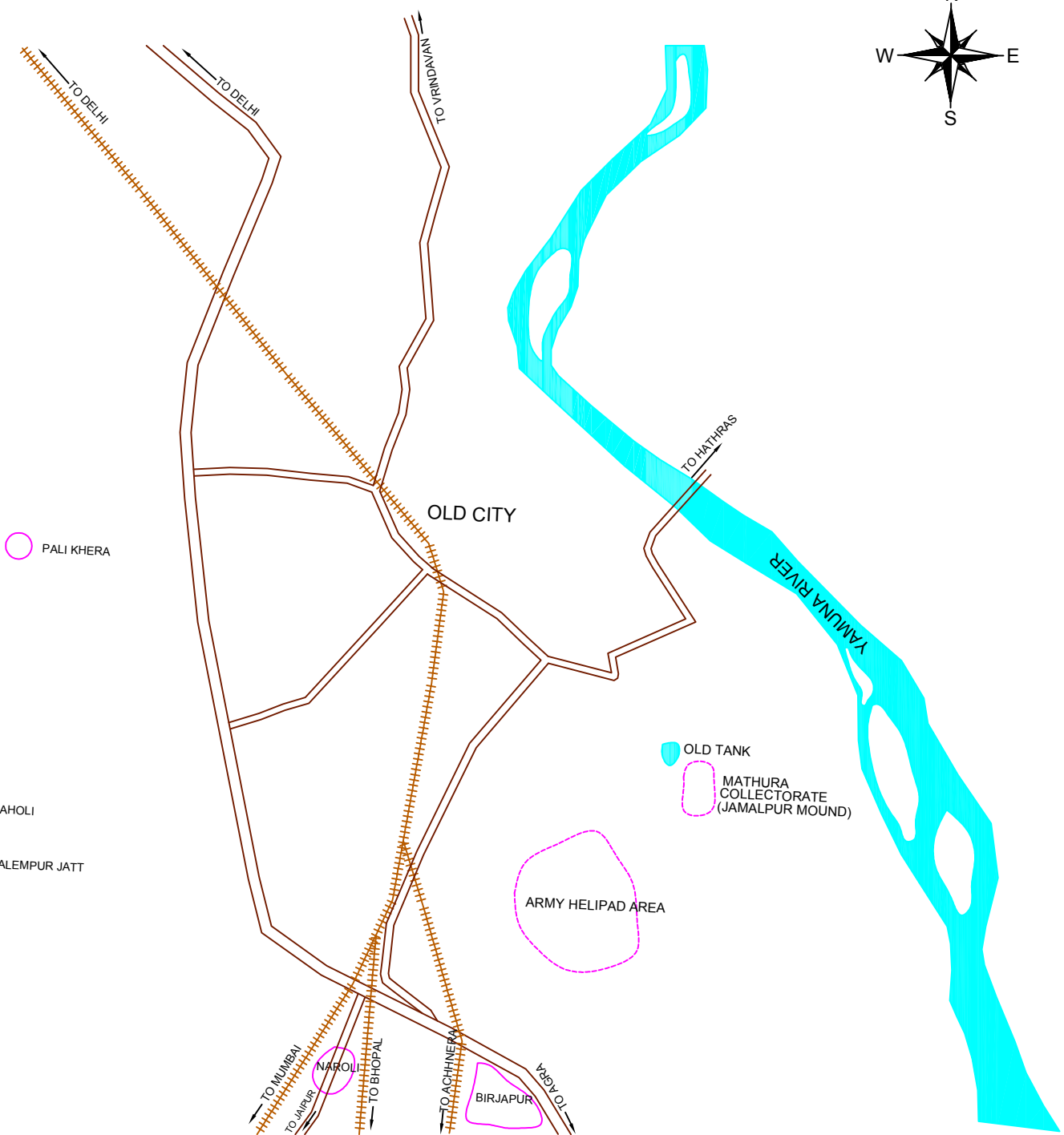
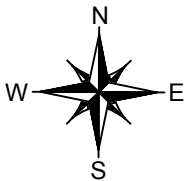


Pl. 9. General view of new site discovered at Narhauri.

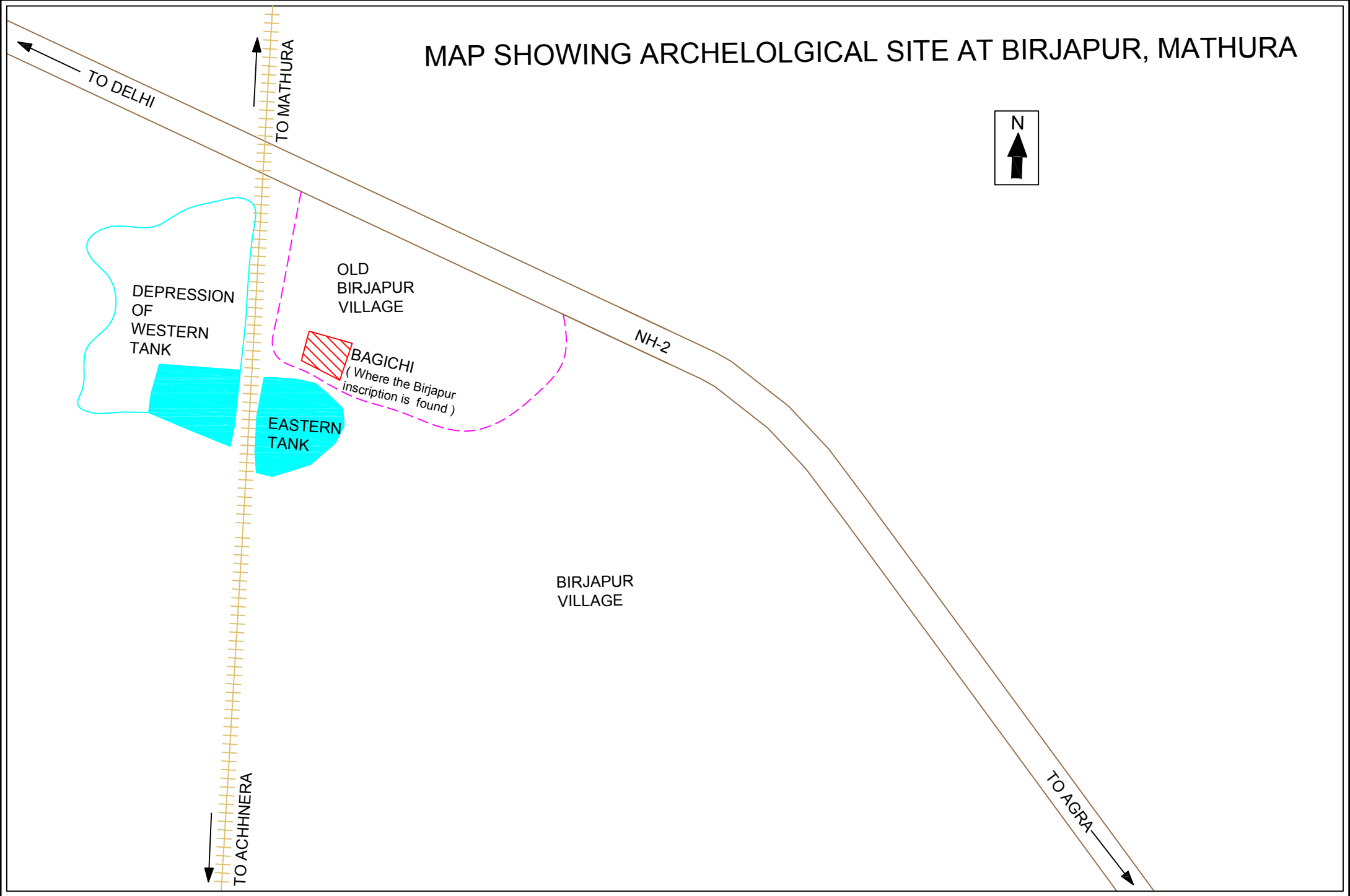
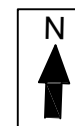


Pl. 10. Brick structures as visible at Narhauili site.

MAP OF MATHURA SHOWING RELATED POSITIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES



MAP SHOWING ARCHELOLGLICAL SITE AT BIRJAPUR, MATHURA



MAP SHOWING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AT NAROLI, MATHURA

