A Report on Excavations at Chandankheda (2009-10), Chandrapur District, Maharashtra

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Received: 16 August 2015; Accepted: 20 September 2015; Revised: 23 October 2015
Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 3 (2015): 562-580

***Abstract**: Explorations and excavations are a valid mean to attest or bring forth the historicity of archaeological remains at any site. When the initial explorations and related discoveries shed light on the archaeological potential of ancient site Chandankheda, Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, the site was taken up for excavations by Department of AIHC & Archaeology, Nagpur University, State Department Archaeology and Museums, Nagpur, and INTACH, Chandrapur Chapter during 2009-10. Present paper is a summation of results of excavations at Chandankheda. It explores the antiquity of habitation at the site and its gradual development across various periods.*

Keywords: Chandankheda, Maharashtra, Early Iron Age, Pre-Satavahana, Satavahana, Vakataka, Medieval

Introduction

Chandrapur is one of the important districts in Vidarbha. The district is situated in south east part of Maharashtra surrounded by Nagpur on the north, the newly formed state of Telangana on the south, Yavatmal on the west and the densely forested district of Gadchiroli on the east. Wardha and Wainganga surround the district from east and west respectively. Chandrapur district is well known for its mineral wealth- coal, iron and limestone and its rich forest cover. The district prides in its immense forest cover. The ancient site of Chandankheda (20˚16'0"N, 79˚12'0"E) is located on the banks of Erai River,main tributary of Wardha River (Fig 1). The site is situated 22 km northeast of Bhadrawati Taluka in Chandrapur District and around 130km southeast of Nagpur in Maharashtra (Fig 2). The site was discovered by Shri Ashok Singh Thakur in 2006 however it caught further attention when a terracotta sealing was reported from the site. Due to its potential, it was jointly taken up for excavation by the Department of AIHC and Archaeology, Nagpur University, State Department of Archaeology and Museums, Nagpur, and INTACH, Chandrapur Chapter during 2009-10.

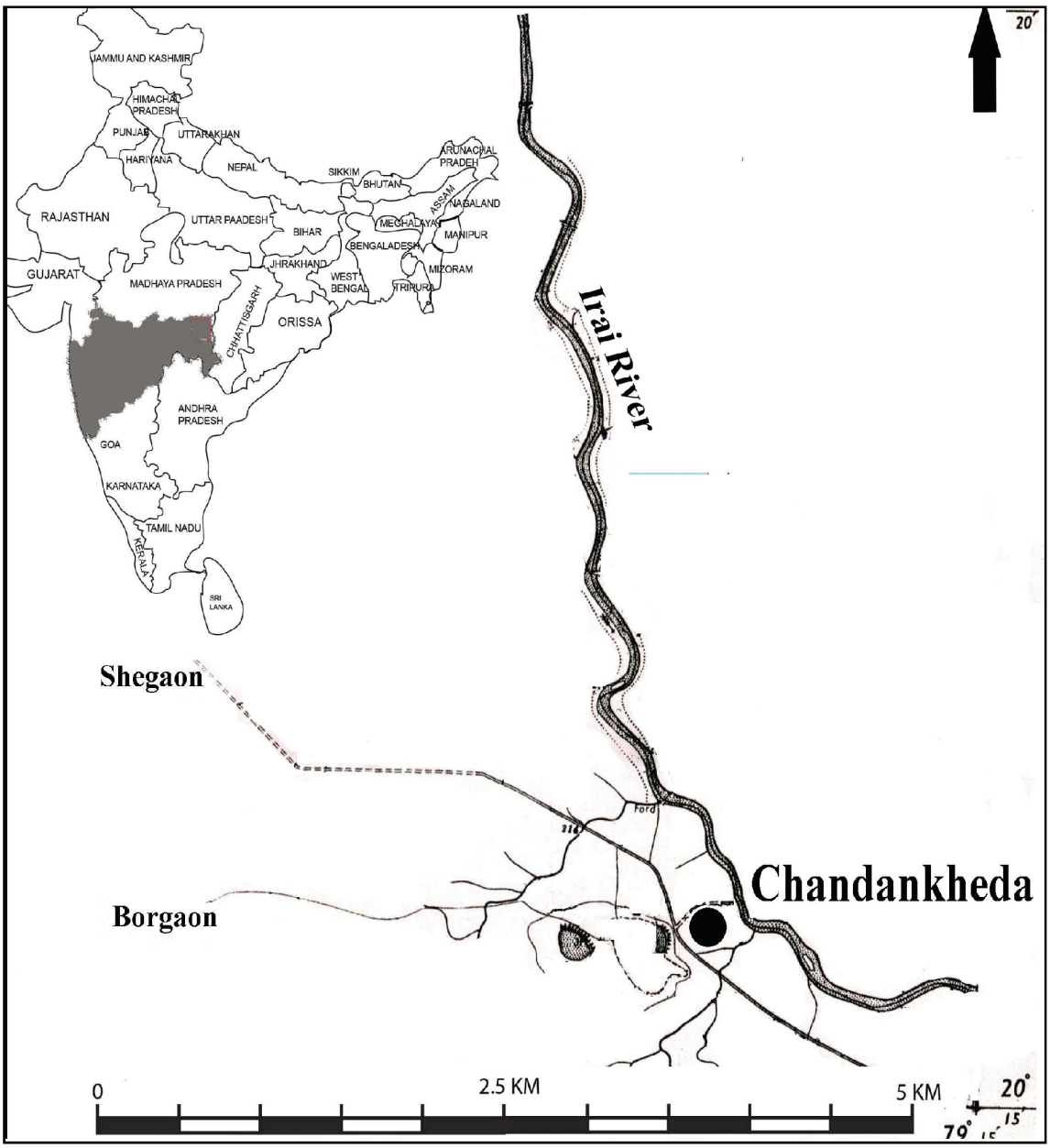

Figure 1: Map showing the location of Chandankheda

From surface explorations it appeared that the site was fortified and retained a huge cultural deposit. This massive fortification measuring 500 x 500 meters is still extant with a moat encircling it (Fig 3). Modern village of Chandankheda is situated over the ancient cultural remains. It is also noteworthy to mention that the Chandankheda is one of the biggest villages in Chandrapur District and its dense population subsequently disturbed the ancient remains. Furthermore, remaining area of the site is heavily disturbed by brick manufacturing activity since the white deposit of ancient site is a preferred and suitable material for brick making. Thus almost all the deposit at the site is disturbed and dug up (Fig 4). Owing to importance of the site and rapidly deteriorating site deposit, it was excavated with the aims and objectives such as:

- To ascertain the nature, cultural sequence and chronology of the site.
- To see the phases of formation of fortification and the moat.
- To understand the settlement system within the fortification and traces of the same outside the fortification, if any.
- To correlate the site with other contemporary cultures of the region.

As stated earlier, present population rests upon the ancient habitation remains. Rest of the area was thoroughly disturbed due to the soil digging for brick manufacturing industry. A little area was thus available for excavation. Trenches were taken in 12 meter area in step cutting manner to reach the natural deposit. In the excavation a five-fold cultural sequence was recovered (Fig 5).

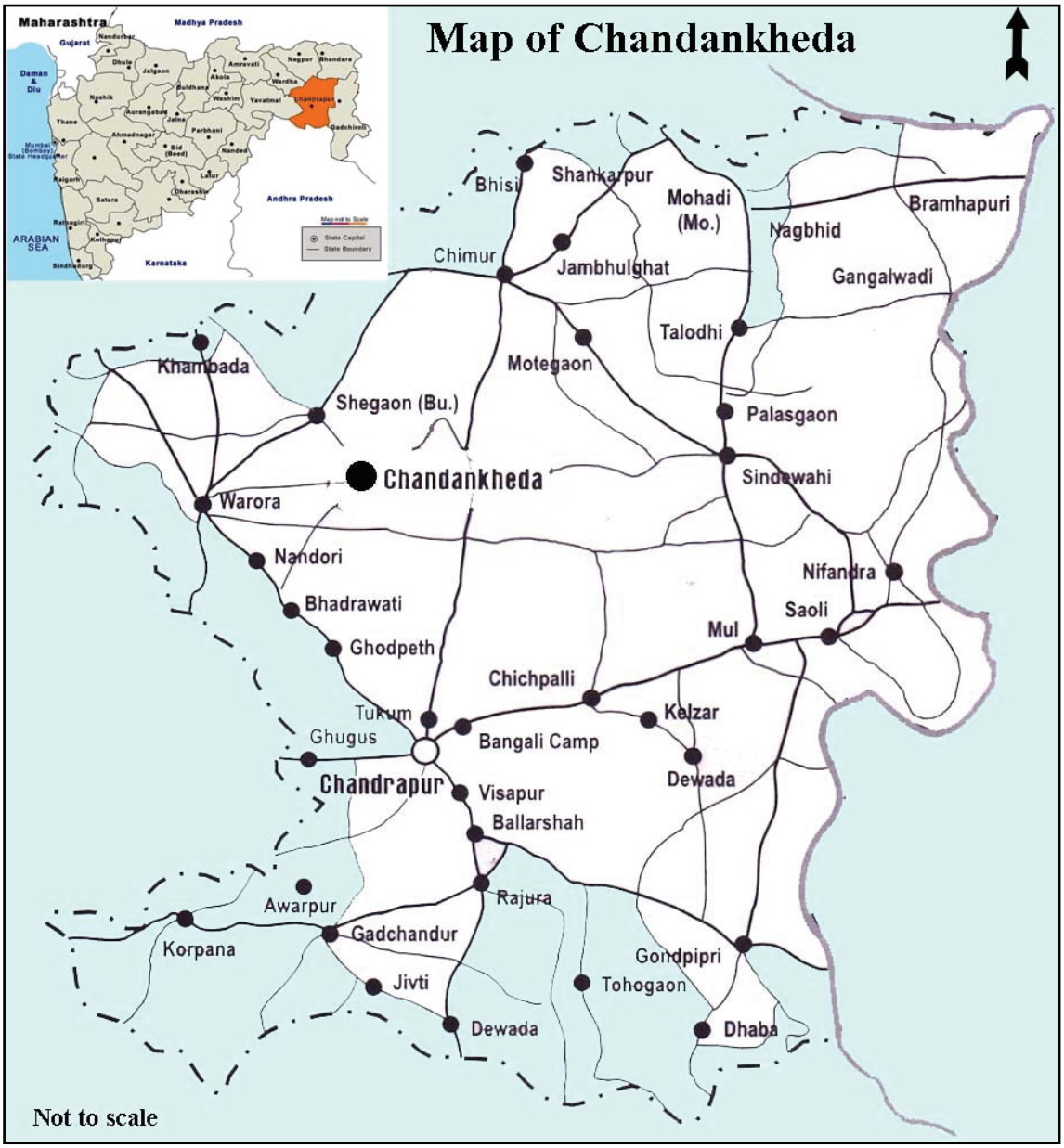

Figure 2: Map showing the Location of Chandankheda in Chandrapur District

Figure 3: Disturbance of the habitation deposit due to brick manufacturing Process

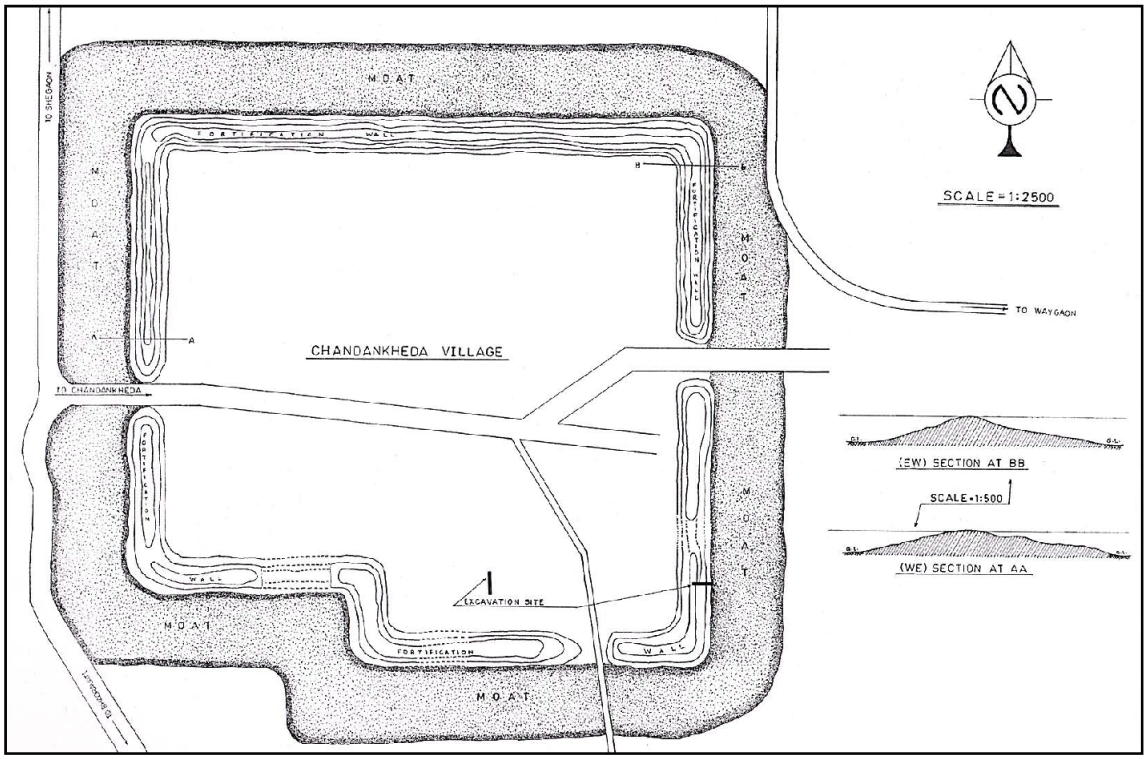

Figure 4: Plan of Fortification and moat at Chandankheda

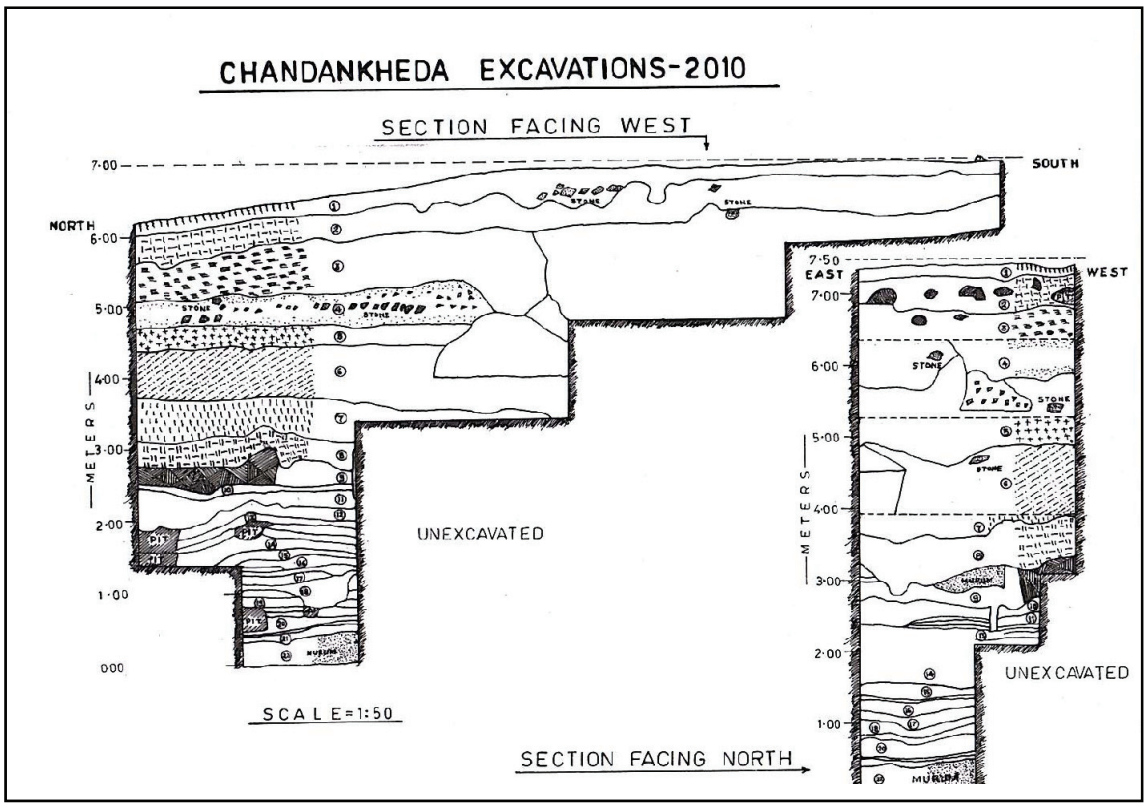

Figure 5: Stratigraphy of Chandankheda

Periodization

The thickness of the total deposit at Chandankheda is seven meter. This huge cultural stratum was divided into 21 layers and subsequently five periods (Table 1) according to associated cultural material, ceramic assemblage, numismatic findings etc. Brief description of these periods is as follows:

Table 1: Cultural Periods at Chandankheda

No.	Cultural Period	Layer No.
Period I	Early Iron Age	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
Period II	Pre-Satavahana	9, 10, 11
Period III	Satavahana	6, 7, 8
Period IV	Vakataka	4, 5
Period V	Medieval	1, 2, 3

Period I: Early Iron Age

The remains pertaining to the earliest settlements at the site were very scanty due to small area of excavation. These earliest settlers habited directly on the natural soil. Successive floor levels made of thin layers of clay, silt and lime were noticed throughout the strata of this period. Evidence of crushed murum mixed in the clay for construction of floor is found. In the lower levels, floors were not evenly rammed and not well finished. However, in course of time, the settlement seems to have prospered

as the yield of pottery and other antiquarian remains increased in quantity in the subsequent deposits. The ceramic industry is chiefly represented by black and red ware, micaceous red ware and the red ware. The ceramics in this phase especially black and red ware shows affinity with typical Megalithic pottery of the Vidarbha (Fig 6). Heavily encrusted pieces of iron were also documented. No remains of burial monuments are seen in and around site. On the basis of similarity of cultural material with other excavated sites of Early iron age in this region, this period can be ascertained to 1000 -600 BC.

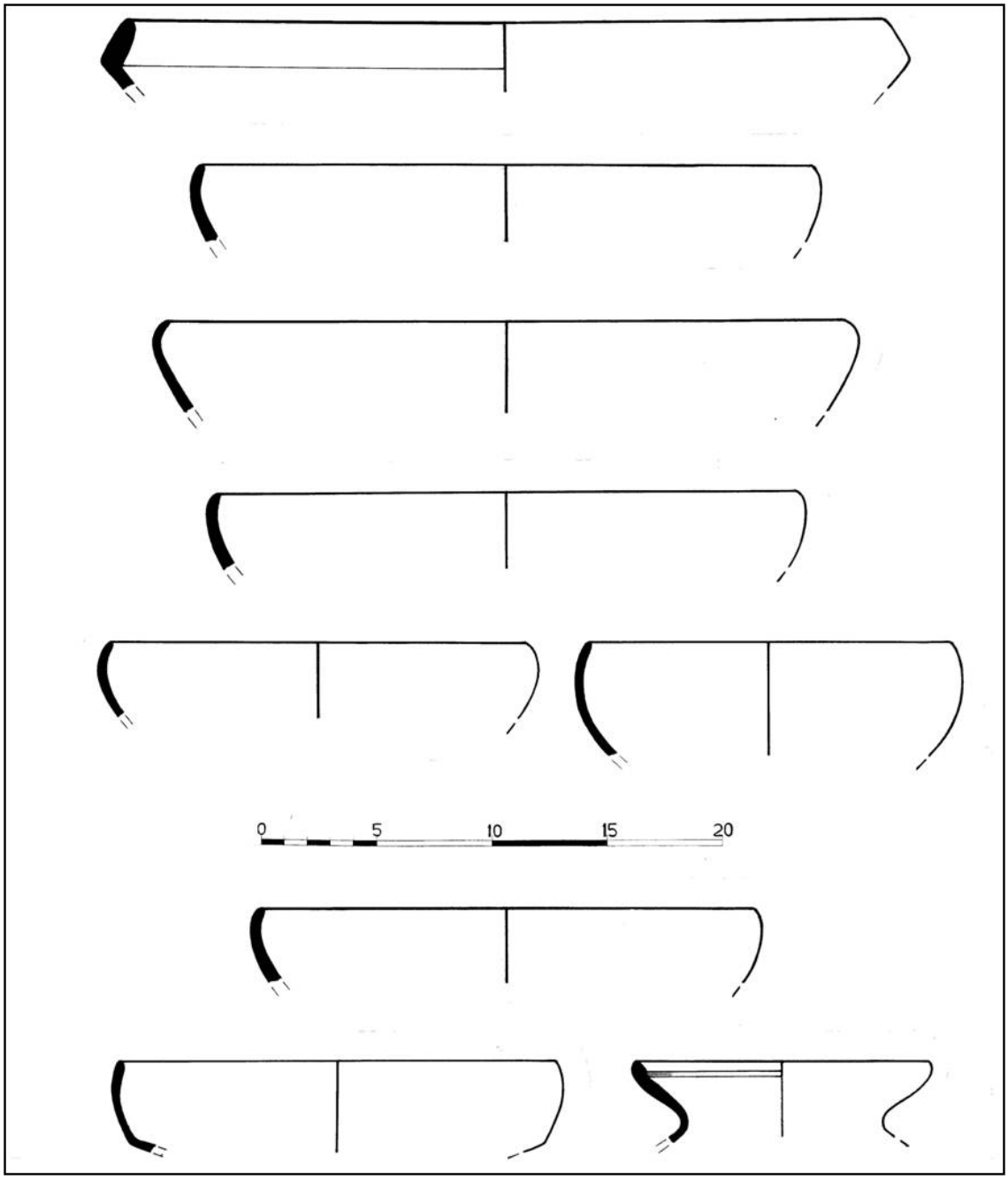

Figure 6: Ceramics of Period I

Period II: Pre-Satavahana

The deposit of Pre-Satavahana, witnessed some fundamental change in the cultural component. An abrupt transformation in the total layout of the house plan and the construction material indicated a transformation from the rural to semi-urban settlement. Ceramic assemblage comprised of coarse Red ware, Red slipped ware, Black Burnished ware and Black and Red ware. Main ceramic shapes are represented by medium size globular pots having short neck and collared rim, bowls, basins, carinated bowls with flattish base etc. (Fig 7). Antiquarian remains consist of obsidian ear-studs, bone points, terracotta beads, beads of semiprecious stones like carnelian, jasper etc. The outstanding discoveries of this period are fragmentary legged querns and mullers of sand stone with typical Mauryan polish. Solitary die- struck coin with animal impression (un-inscribed) is an important numismatic find. Antiquity and cultural material of this period can be dated to 600-200 BC.

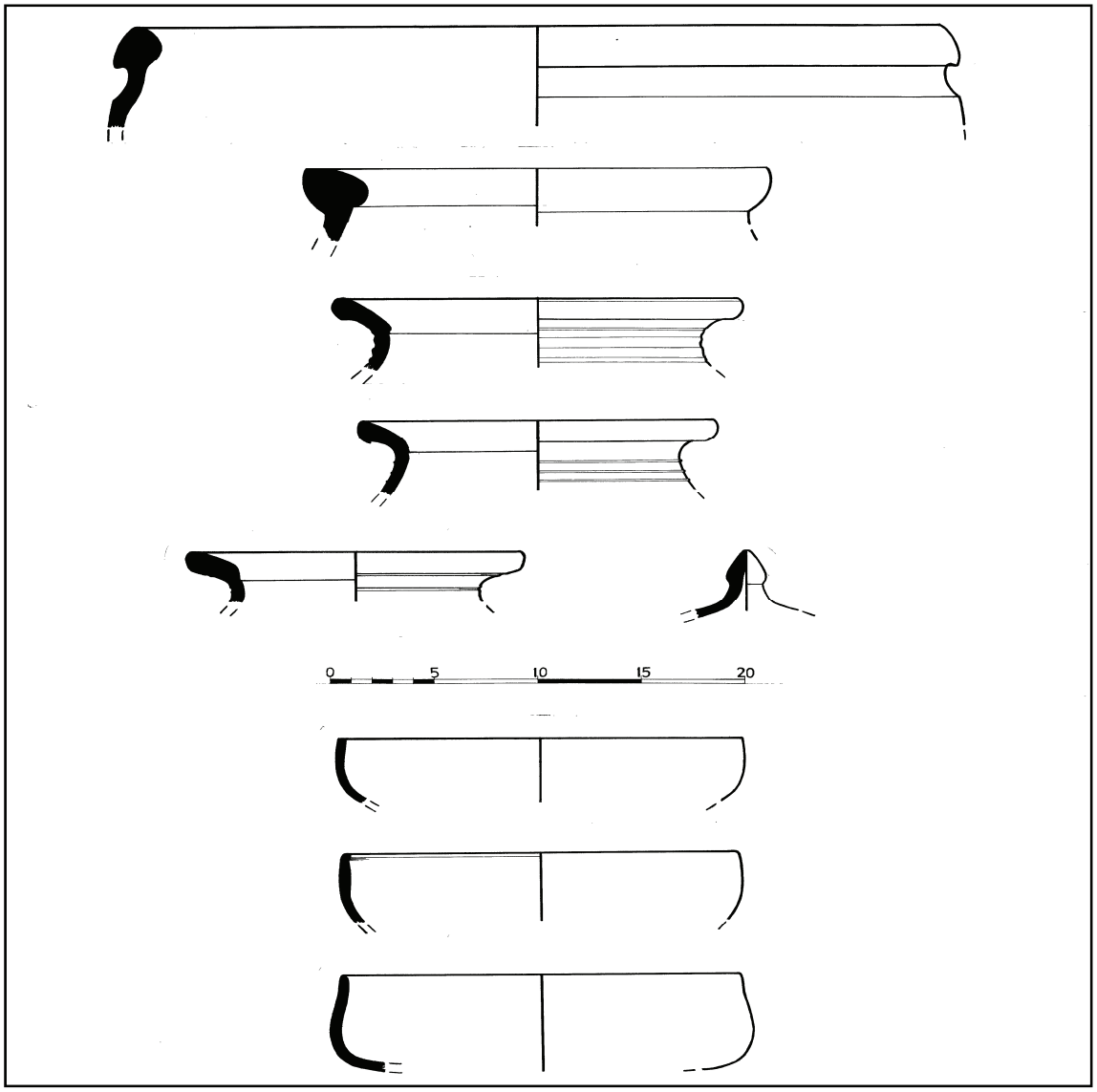

Figure 7: Ceramic assemblage of Period I and II

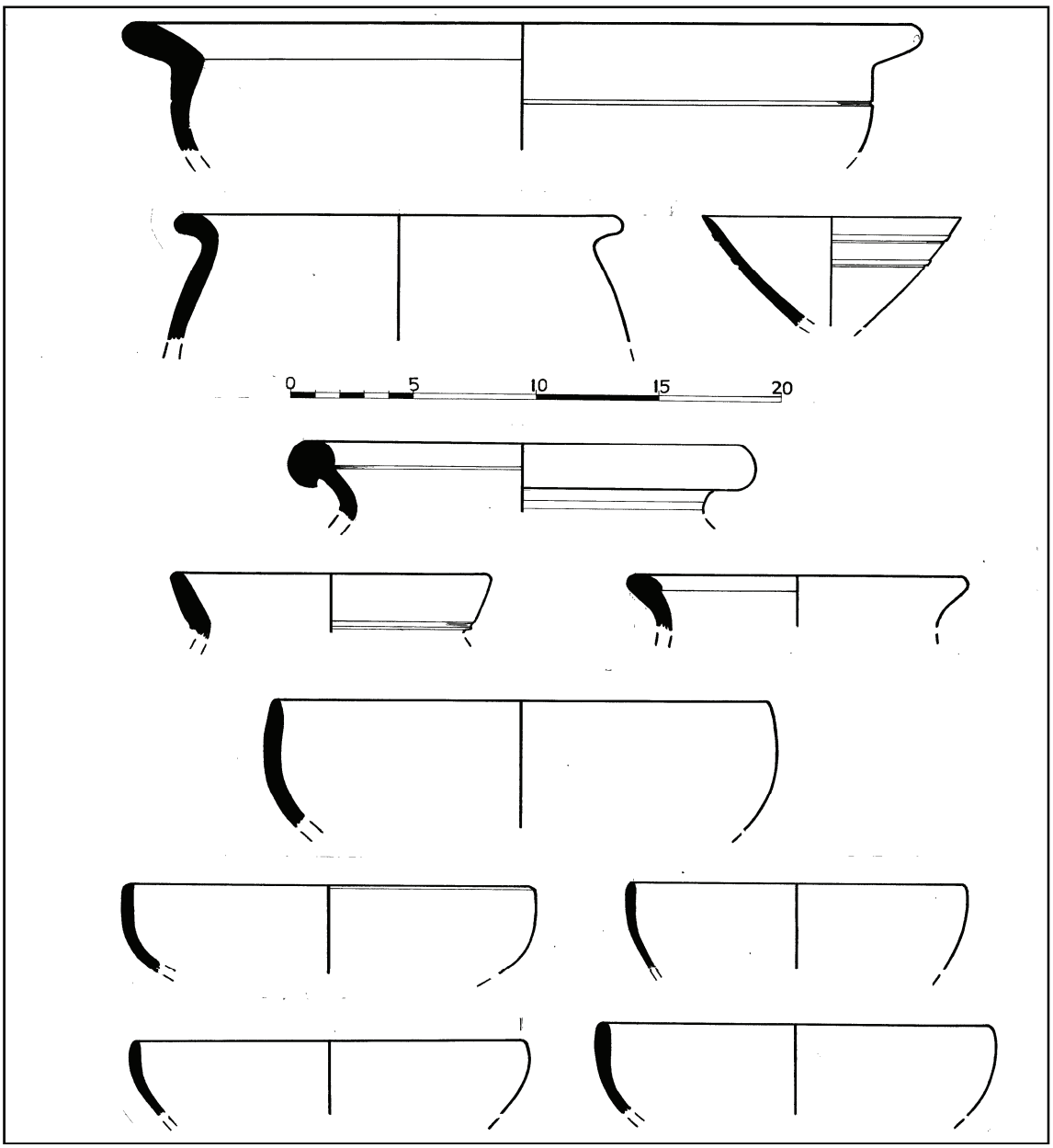

Figure 8: Ceramic assemblage of period III

Period III: Satavahana

The deposit of period III is assigned to Satavahana period on the basis of numismatic evidence. This period witnessed large usage of bricks, tiles, ring wells and also increase in antiquity remains. Red ware, red polished ware, red slipped wares were found in large number besides megarian ware and stone ware. Common pottery shapes are 'V' shaped bowl, lid-cum-bowl, globular pots with undercut rim, storage jars, handi with constricted neck are the few familiar shape come across in this deposit(Fig. 8). Antiquities of this period are copper coins, beads of semiprecious stone, beads of terracotta and glass. Fragments of glass bangles, hopscotch's, copper antimony rods, kaolin and terracotta figurines are also found in large number. Quality and quantity of

cultural material and its spread over the large area suggest this is the most flourishing period at this site. Material remains of the period especially numismatic findings suggest that this period can be dated safely 2nd Century BC to AD 2nd Century.

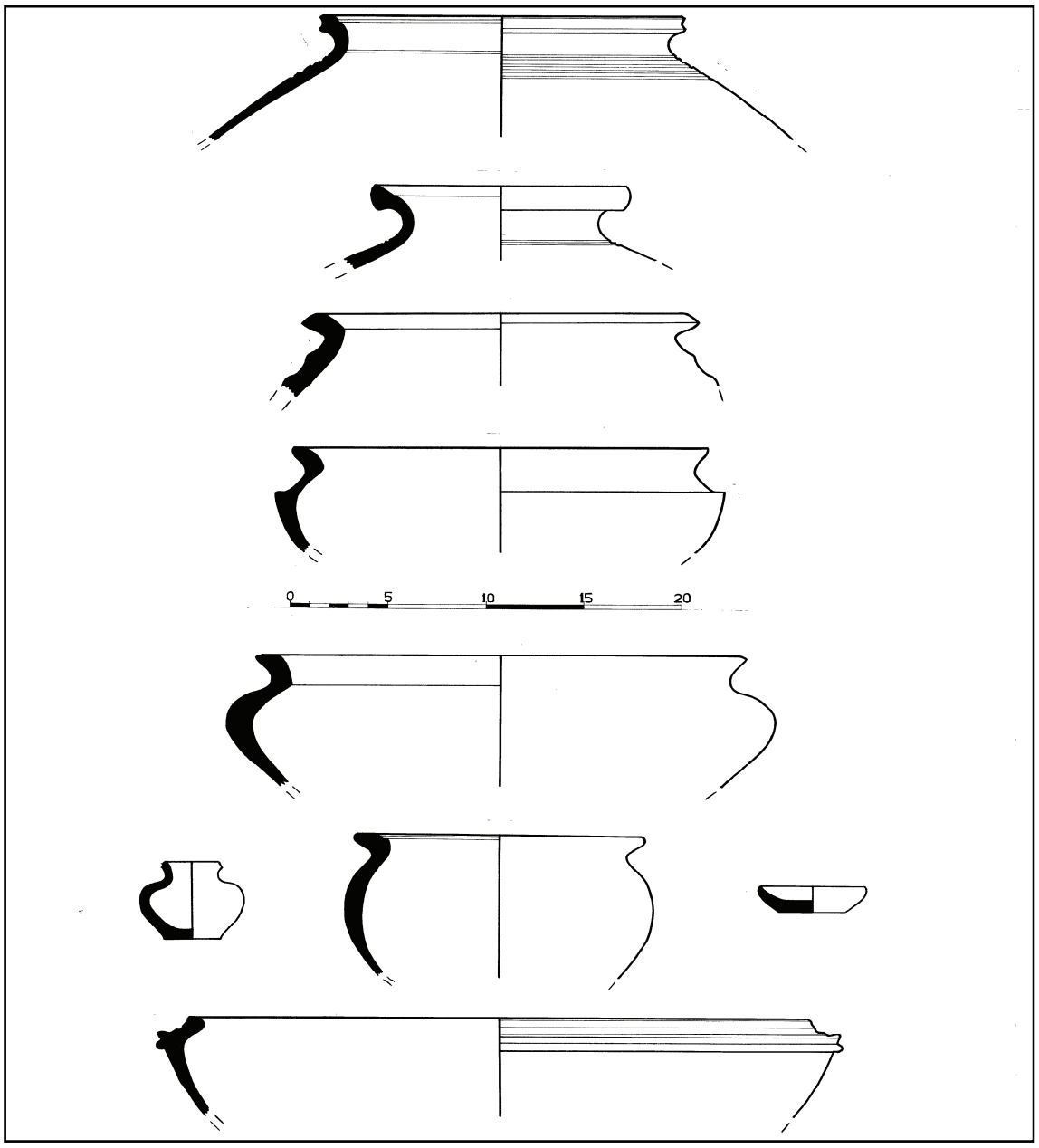

Figure 9: Pottery of period IV

Period IV: Vakataka

Deposit of period IV is identified as belonging to Vakataka period. The cultural material includes floor made of murum and crushed brick bats. Ceramic industry includes mica wash red ware, red slipped ware, red ware and black ware. Constricted necked handi with angular rim, globular pot with short and thick neck and rim storage jars are the peculiar shapes noticed in ceramic assemblage (Fig 9). A few stamped pots

were also found in excavations. The finding of a gold coin belonging to *Shri Varahraj* of the Nala dynasty dated to about 5th cent A.D. is the most distinguishing find of this period. Antiquity of the period includes terracotta bangles, beads of terracotta and glass (small in size) and terracotta figurine. This period is assigned the timeframe stretching from AD 3rd century to AD 5th Century.

Period V: Medieval

Deposit of this period assigned to medieval period is over a meter Floors during this period were made of murum, silt and brickbats. Use of boulders in foundation also noticed. Ceramics found in this period include coarse black ware, black burnished ware, mica wash red ware etc. Shapes are small and medium size globular pots, handis, thick plates and big storage jars. Antiquities included good amount of polychrome glass bangles, glass beads and copper coins.

Fortification

As aforesaid, Chandankheda is surrounded by a massive fortification, 4-5 meter high, measuring about 500 x 500 meters. This fortification is surrounded by a moat on all sides. Main entrance of the fortification was from west. One gate was also from south. In order to identify its period of construction, the fortification was excavated vertically wherein six trenches measuring 2x3 meters were laid from the top to bottom (Fig 10). South-eastern part of the fortification was selected for excavation due to its intact nature. Excavation showed that the fortification was constructed during the period III. The excavation revealed three phases of its construction. Lowest level of the fortification (Phase I) was made of thick and well rammed pot sherds and lake clay having deposit of 1.5 meters. This deposit is solid and heavily rammed and a few remains of crushed murum and potsherds were also noticed in it. This deposit is overlain by a thick and compact deposit of murum and mud of about 1 meter (Phase II). On the top of the fortification, boulders of various sizes were found embedded in red soil and murum (Phase III). Deposit of this phase measures 3 meters. Phase I marks the construction of fortification during Satavahana period. Phase II of the fortification relates to later additions during Satavahana times again when the Western Kshatrapas started gaining influence in the region. Phase III represents a later addition in form of big boulders.

Structural Remains

As stated earlier, since the area of excavation was limited, therefore no complete remains of structures were revealed. Nevertheless, limited remains do provide an idea regarding structural pattern. Successive habitation floors at lower level deposit at Chandankheda suggests that the early Iron Age people settled in wattle and daub houses with lime plastered walls and thatched roofs. Use of bricks for construction was first seen during period III. However, during the same period, bricks were not used in the fortification wall at the site. Practice of use of stones for foundation of structure was noticed during the medieval period. A few structural remains were also visible from

the surface. These are represented by circular well, brick walls and floors. Wedge shaped bricks were used in constructions of well (Fig. 11).

Figure 10: Excavations of Rampart at Chandankheda

Figure 11: Brick well, Excavations at Chandankheda

Artifacts

A variety of artifacts were collected from the site during excavations and explorations. They include:

Stone Beads

A large number of semi-precious stone beads were recovered from surface and during the excavation as well. Though the beads are reported from the site since Pre Satavahana period, it is only during Satavahana period that they become abundant. Therefore Satavahana beads are chosen up for detailed analysis regarding preferred raw material and shape of bead. The analysis of 240 beads recovered from concerned period show that Carnelian was most favored material followed by quartz, garnet and banded agate (Fig. 12). Analysis of the shapes of beads during Satavahana period reveals that regular barrel shaped beads were most desired among the people. Circular cylinder, circular barrel, spherical are other prominent shapes in observed during Satavahana period (Fig. 13).

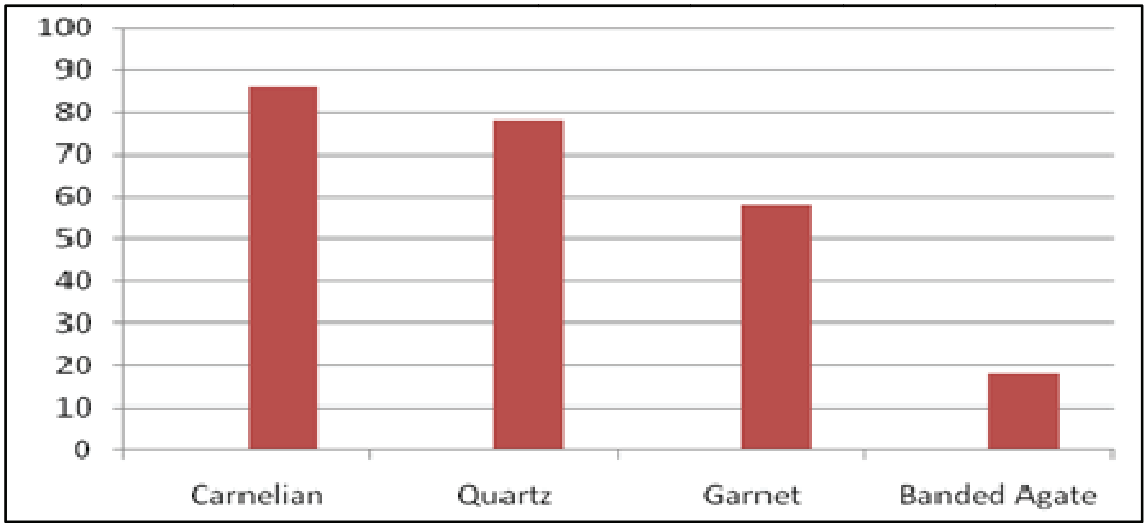

Figure 12: Raw materials used for manufacturing the beads

Terracotta Objects

Terracotta objects from Chandankheda can be classified under following types- animal figurines, human figurines, play objects, ornamental and miscellaneous objects. Figurines are both handmade and mould made. Special mention may be made of molded human figurines (Fig 14). Seven gamesmen are also documented from the site. They can be divided into the four types a) tapering cylinders with convex top and flat base, b) straight cylinders with convex top and flat base, c) tapering cylinders with concave top and flat base and d) tapering cylinders with broken top and flat base. Hopscotches discs are too reported from the excavations. They are made by breaking and rounding the potsherds either by cutting or grinding. Terracotta areca nut beads outnumber other shapes and are found in various sizes. These beads are prepared out of medium fine clay and sometimes even from coarse clay. Parallel striation marks at very close intervals on surface of the beads indicates that these were made on fast

moving wheel. As far as ear ornaments are concerned, five specimens of ear ornaments were found in the excavations. These are cylindrical with concave sides and flat ends, made in medium to crude fabric and are red in color. Holes in both the flat faces of ornament are observed which could be used for inserting a thread. Surface finding of a votive tank offers an insight into the religious practices at Chandankheda.

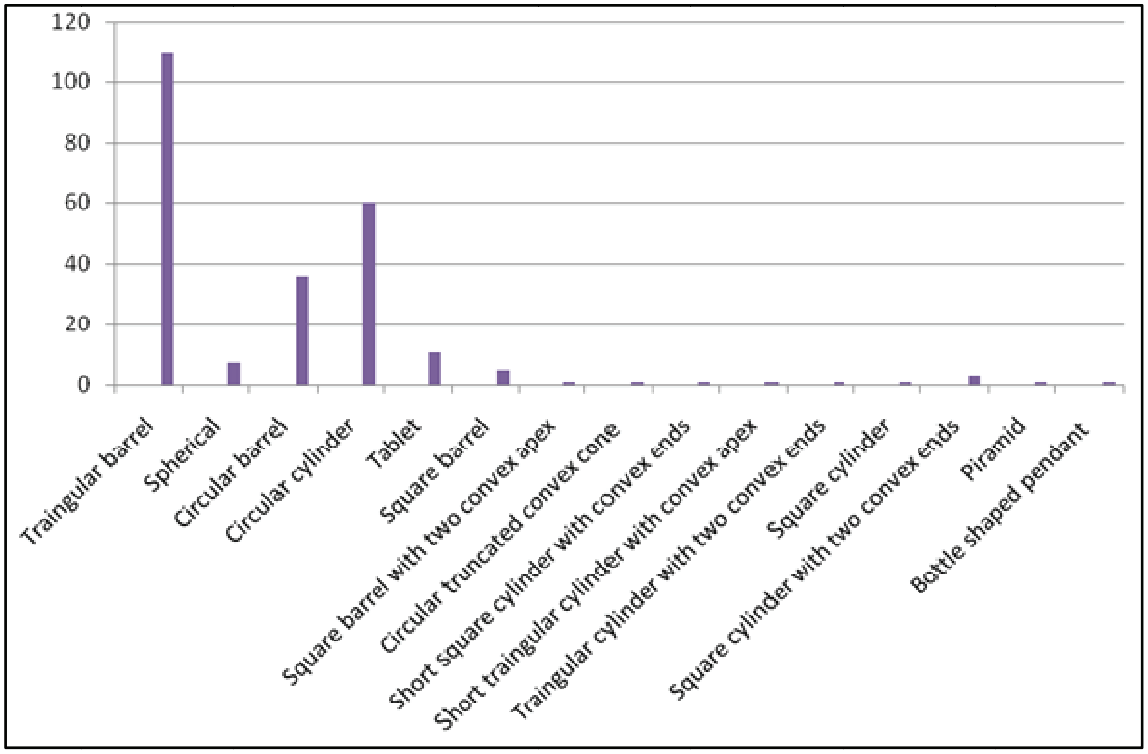

Figure 13: Shapes of beads from Chandankheda

Stone Artifacts

Stone antiquities chiefly include legged querns, pestles and mullers. These items are reported from the earliest deposits at the site nevertheless their extensive usage was observed during Satavahana period. It appears that the need for grinding stones increased during Satavahana times due to change in food habits and use of spices which was aided by their easy accessibility from south India via internal trade during the aforesaid period. Presently, local villagers worship these legged portions as local deity. Apart from above mentioned specimen stone hopscotches and stone beads were also found in excavations.

Coins

From Chandankheda thirty three coins of copper, lead, silver and gold were found. These coins were recovered from stratified contexts during excavations as well as from surface. Copper coins were found in most number. Copper cast coin with three arched hill on obverse and circle with three spokes on reverse was found in excavations. Such type was hitherto unreported (Meshram *et.al.* 2014:2-27). Few copper coins are so corroded that they are beyond recognition. A lead coin from Pre- Satavahana level

Figure 14: Broken human figurine from Chandankheda

bearing elephant symbol resembles early punch marked coins of Vidarbha Janapada. Besides copper, few silver coins of Western Kshatrapas were also found. Significant ones amongst them, datable to second century AD, are those of Rudrasena II, Bhartudaman and Rudrasimha II. An important discovery was that of solitary gold repoussé coin of Sri Varaharaj of Nala dynasty. Recumbent seated bull to the left below bramhi characters *Sri Varaharaj* is depicted on observe of this gold coin. It is evident that in the later period, this coin was used asa bullae as it has two holes at the top. The Bahamani coins of Ahmad Shah, Firuz Shah, Muhhamad Shah II, Bin Hymayun Shahwere also documented. Coin of Gujrat Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah III datable to AD 1536-1553 is also reported from Chandankheda (Fig. 15).

Sealing's

No sealing's were recovered from the excavations at Chandankheda. However, a significant terracotta sealing was accidently recovered many years before the excavations while digging the soil for brick manufacturing. This seal was reported by Shri Gautam in the second bulletin of the Chandrapur Coin Society. After its reporting, this sealing was studied by Bhandare (Bhandare 2005:3). Consequently many other scholars too published their description regarding the same sealing (Kulkarni 2007). Size of this terracotta sealing is 65 x 70 mm (Fig 16). It bears square stamp constituting of four line Bramhi inscription. Below the inscription *Yupa* in railing with *nandipada*

Figure 15: Coins from Chandankheda

Figure 16: Sealing found at Chandankheda (Courtesy: Ashok Singh Thakur)

hanging from the staff, an *Ujjaini* symbol and a triangle headed standard are present. The seal mentions thirteenth year of King *Sri Satakarni*. It also suggests that the ancient name of the Chandankheda was *Kapisakata* meaning a big village holds with 400 villages under its authority. If it is so, it proves that Chandankheda was an important site of the region. Importance of the site is also attested byits massive fortification. Direct reference to Satavahana king *Satakarni I* in Chandankheda sealing gives an extra importance to the site. It is therefore accepted that though the sealing was discovered prior to the excavations, nevertheless, it is significant in drawing archaeological explains about the site and its nature.

Zoological Remains

Faunal analysis of the animal remains recovered from Chandankheda excavations was carried outat Deccan College Post Graduate Research Institute. The studies on the faunal assemblage recovered from the excavations at Chandankheda have helped in identifying a variety of animals ranging from mammals, birds, reptile to mollusks. A preliminary study of the bone fragments suggested that these belonged to cattle (*Bos indicus*), buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), goat and sheep. The presence of both wild (*Sus scrofa)* and domestic (*Sus domesticus)* pigs is also identified at the site. Presence of horse (*Equus caballus)* was identified by a single isolated incisor. This evidence for horse was reported only from Vakataka period. Domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*)is identified only in the medieval period and is represented by an unfused metapodial and a part of the humorous. The studies have also helped to show the extent of the role played by animals both wild and domestic during the three periods at the site. The domestic animals mainly cattle, goats, pigs along with wild herbivores were exploited mainly for dietary purposes. Among them maximum utilized were cattle, both cow/ox and buffalo had played a major role in the subsistence economy at the site throughout its occupation. Along with meat, cattle may have provided dairy products, hide, helped in traction and agricultural activities. Herding of goats was also carried out for obtaining meat and other secondary products like milk (Arti Deshpande-Mukherjee: *personal Communication*).

Discussion

The excavations at Chandankheda established that the site was first taken up for habitation during Early Iron Age. Structural remains from this period are very meager however successive habitation layers suggested wattle and daub structures indicating village settlement. Similar structural arrangements have been identified in other excavated sites of Vidarbha. A few iron implements are also found from the associated deposit but they are too fragmentary for any identification. There was no break in cultural sequence and the habitation continued well after early Iron Age. Sherds of Northern black polished ware and stratified numismatic findings relate to this continued habitation at site during second urbanization. With the advent of early Christian era shifting of political power is seen in the India and subsequently in Vidarbha. Satavahana dynasty took charge of Vidarbha and a large area came under

their influence. At Chandankheda, massive fortification relating to Satavahana period suggests its strategic importance. The occurrence of quite number of beads of semiprecious stones like agate, carnelian, quartz etc. gamesmen, beads, pendants of terracotta, human and animal figurines, terracotta plaques, antimony rods and associated cultural material suggests flourishing settlement at Chandankheda during Satavahana period. Sealing of *Satakarni* also attests to the same. It was during this period that bricks were first used for making houses and wells. Large numbers of terracotta tiles of Satavahana period were also found in excavations as well as from surface. Next phase of occupation was identified as Vakataka. Gold coin of Nal king *Shri Varahraj* with characters in box headed Brahmi of Vakataka times was important finding of this deposit. After a gap of few centuries site was again occupied in medieval period and it is aptly proven by numerous coins of different rulers during medieval period. Continuous habitation at the site right from early Iron Age to Vakataka period attests that the site was a preferred locale for habitation offering numerous opportunities for sustenance of culture in various periods.

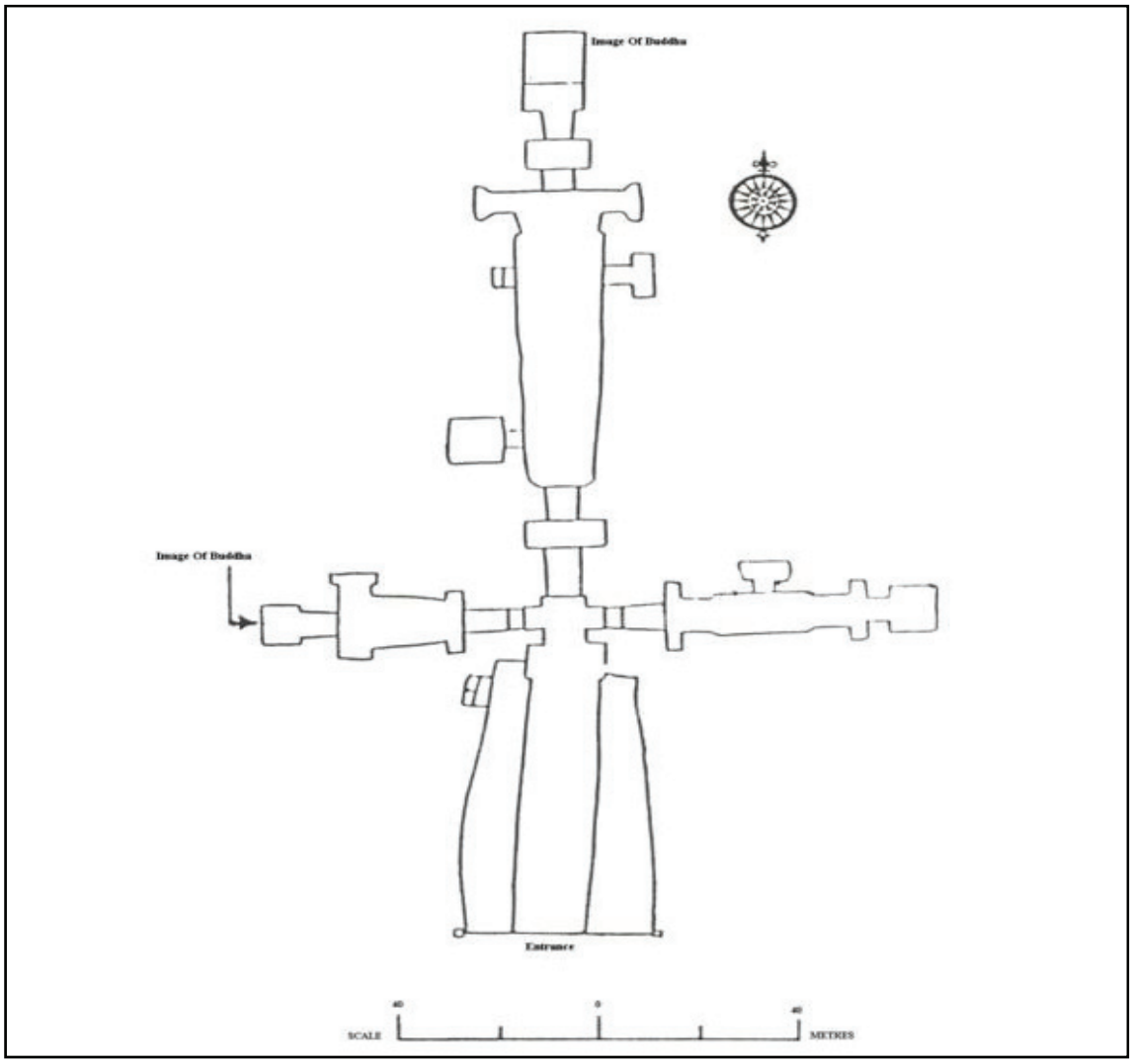

Figure 17: Vijayasen Cave, Bhadravati, Chandrapur

The ancient name of the site was *Kapishkatak* meaning hold of 400 villages. It indicates the important position and authority that the site enjoyed. Location of Chandankheda shows that the site had a prominent position in trade route connecting north to south through Prayag, Bundelkhand, Jabalpur, Wainganga valley and then South India via Telangana during early historic period (Sawant 2006). It appears that during early historic period sites like Pauni, Adam and Chandankheda were connected by internal trade network. Beads of semi-precious stones found at Chandankheda were procured from outside since no evidence relating to their local manufacture was recovered from excavations. Finding of imported wares and other material demonstrates that both internal and external trade was in vogue.

Excavated sites near Wainganga drainage like Adam (Nath 1992:69-79) and Pauni (Nath 1998) incorporates Buddhists religious structures such as stupa near the site. Chandankheda is an exception in this regard sinceno religious structure like stupa was found or noticed within the site or its adjacent area. However terracotta object found from surface at Chandankheda bearing symbols of *shrivatsa*, *triratna*, tree etc suggest Buddhist affinity. A Buddhist rock-cut cave known as *Vijasena* is situated 22 km away from the Chandankheda (Fig. 17). Though the distance between habitation site Chandankheda and*Vijasena* cave is much today however it is noteworthy to mention that the *Vijasena* cave was constructed during Satavahana period and the site too has Satavahana deposit (Meshram 2007). It is too early to make any assumption but it can be hypothised that the fund for construction of *Vijasen* cave might have been derived from the natives of Chandankheda. This may offer a possible explanation to not finding any religious architecture at Chandankheda. However, at this stage it is only a conjecture. Future researches may throw fresh light in this regard.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Archaeological Survey of India for giving the permit for excavations. We are grateful to the Department of Archaeology, Government of Maharashtra, Nagpur University and INTACH Chandrapur Chapter for their support and help. We express sincere thanks to Dr. Amol Kulkarni, Dr. Arti Deshpande-Mukherjee, Dr. Tilok Thakuria and Mohan Pardhi for their help in data analysis. Thanks are due to all participants especially Dr. Shantanu Vaidya, Jaya Wahane, Dr. Dhiraj Chaudhary, Pramod Chauhan, Dr. Vijay Gedam, Ashavir Gajbhiye, Vandna Khedikar and Dhanraj Sakhre. Last but not the least, thanks are due to the villagers of the Chandankheda for their support, encouragement and local logistic support.

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